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SECRETS AND SILENCE: WITHHOLDING WOMEN
IN THE WORKS OF EDITH WHARTON

Isabelle Parsons

Thesis submitted towards the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in English, July 2021
The Open University

CANDIDATE DECLARATION

This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of collaborative work. No part of this thesis has been submitted to this or another university for any degree, diploma or other qualification. The text does not exceed 100 000 words.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When I was sixteen years old, my French schoolteacher taught us Jacques Prévert's moving 1946 poem, 'Déjeuner du Matin'. Afterwards, I felt more confident about employing the *passé composé*, but was also struck by a new awareness of the often mystifying ways of men and women, and of the consequences of silence – of not speaking.

Three decades on, I thank my outstanding supervisors, Shafquat Towheed and Sara Haslam, for helping me navigate the intricacies of Edith Wharton's secrets and silences with unstinting generosity and deftness, and for reinforcing my sense that this was a meaningful endeavour. Their enthusiasm, expertise, and thought-provoking insights and questions stimulated and sustained me throughout. I am so privileged to have had them in my corner.

I also would like to single out Sue Asbee for encouraging me to submit my proposal for a doctoral study – and for many joyful discussions about writers, books and horses in the years that followed – and Lucinda Borkett-Jones, for commenting incisively and sensitively on this thesis in the final weeks of its preparation.

In June 2019 I was fortunate enough to visit the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University, where I consulted the Edith Wharton Collection. This library's knowledgeable staff and stylish, comfortable reading room made the time spent there an experience that I hope to repeat someday soon.

My research benefitted from significant financial support for which I am deeply grateful. My visit to the Beinecke was funded through an Edith Wharton Society Award for Archival Research, as well as The Open University's Personal Research Allowance for postgraduate students and its Research Student Support Fund. The timing of my transatlantic journey turned out to be extremely felicitous. By the summer of 2020 a global pandemic had caused libraries across the world to close their doors, but book purchases facilitated by an Open University Research Training Support Grant greatly alleviated the potential impact of a locked down world on the completion of this thesis. My degree at The Open University was financed entirely through its Staff Fee Waiver scheme. The value of this arrangement to the university's Associate Lecturers cannot be overstated.

My final thanks go to John, who welcomed Edith Wharton into our lives and home without a moment's hesitation, and who takes more interest and pleasure in her doings than any other non-Whartonian I know.

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NOTES AND ABBREVIATIONS

1. After their first citation in this thesis, references to the following works appear in the text as page numbers in brackets:

Wharton, Edith, *The Fruit of the Tree* (London: Macmillan, 1907)

—. *The House of Mirth*, ed. by Elizabeth Ammons (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990)

—. *Summer*, intro. by Elizabeth Ammons (New York: Penguin, 1993)

—. *The Reef*, intro by. Louis Auchincloss (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996)

—. *The Age of Innocence*, ed. by Candace Waid (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003)

—. *In Morocco* (London: Taurus Parke Paperbacks, 2004)

—. *Ethan Frome*, intro. by Elaine Showalter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)

—. *The Custom of the Country*, ed. by Stephen Orgel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)

—. *Fighting France: From Dunkerque to Belfort* (London: Hesperus Press, 2010)

2. After their first citation, the following abbreviations of text titles for most cited Wharton biographies, letters, and autobiographical, non-fictional or critical writings are provided alongside page numbers in brackets in the text.

ABG Wharton, Edith, *A Backward Glance* (London: Constable and Company Ltd, 1962)

CV Wharton, Edith, *The Cruise of the Vanadis* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004)

EW Lee, Hermione, *Edith Wharton* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2007)

- EWA* Ammons, Elizabeth, *Edith Wharton's Argument with America* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1980)
- EWB* Lewis, R.W.B., *Edith Wharton: A Biography* (London: Constable, 1975)
- FW* Griffin Wolff, Cynthia, *A Feast of Words: The Triumph of Edith Wharton* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1995)
- LEW* Lewis, R.W.B., and Nancy Lewis, eds, *The Letters of Edith Wharton* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988)
- MMS* Singley, Carol J., *Edith Wharton: Matters of Mind and Spirit* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)
- NG* Benstock, Shari, *No Gifts from Chance: A Biography of Edith Wharton* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1994)
- VR* Wharton, Edith, 'The Vice of Reading', *The North American Review*, 177 (1903), 513-21

3. Archival material held in the Edith Wharton Collection at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, is indicated by a brief descriptive title, series, box and folder number in the footnotes.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In this introductory chapter I present the background to a research project that focuses exclusively on the works of Edith Wharton (1862-1937) in terms of her ‘feminism’ and the twin themes of secrets and silences. I then foreground aspects of Wharton’s autobiography and biography that relate to these themes, present my critical framework, and explain the methodology, texts and organisation of this thesis.

I. BACKGROUND TO RESEARCH

1. Wharton’s posthumous reputation

On 13 August 1937 the obituary section of *The New York Times* announced loudly that ‘Edith Wharton, 75, Is Dead in France’.¹ But after tributes had been paid, commentators on her writing began to fall silent.² Twenty-five years later, Irving Howe’s short, edited collection of critical essays was representative of Wharton scholarship up to that point; by 1971 a volume by Louis Auchincloss was sanguine in its portrayal of the novelist as a relic of her time.³ Writing in the 1990s, Millicent Bell suggested that Wharton’s standing had begun to wane following publication of *The Age of Innocence* in 1920, that her work was perceived as becoming old-fashioned.⁴ More recently, Pamela Knights noted similarly a sense following the novelist’s death that ‘she had dated’; some saw her as failing to produce something new within a literary climate that viewed modernists as displacing the historical novel, and Wharton’s writing as increasingly fit for so-called women’s magazines only.⁵ Shari Benstock has offered a contrasting perspective, describing the 1920s and early 1930s as the ‘age of acclaim’ for Wharton, the Pulitzer for *The Age of Innocence* being only one of a number of literary commendations awarded her, and emphasised Wharton’s significant output and earnings between 1922 and 1936.⁶

What weakened recollections of Wharton’s extraordinary success as a writer, was Percy Lubbock’s (1879-1965) 1947 biography of his one-time friend and mentor. Wharton and

¹ Anon., ‘Edith Wharton, 75, Is Dead in France’, *The New York Times*, 13 August 1937 <<https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/bday/0124.html>> [accessed 3 July 2021].

² Shari Benstock, ‘Edith Wharton 1862-1937: A Brief Biography’, in *A Historical Guide to Edith Wharton*, ed. by Carol J. Singley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp.19-48 (p.47).

³ Louis Auchincloss, *Edith Wharton: A Woman in her Time* (New York: Viking Press, 1971); Irving Howe, ed., *Edith Wharton: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962); also see Pamela Knights, *The Cambridge Introduction to Edith Wharton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp.128-9.

⁴ Millicent Bell, ‘Introduction’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Edith Wharton*, ed. by Millicent Bell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp.1-19 (p.9);

⁵ Knights, *Cambridge*, pp.128-9; Edmund Wilson, ‘Justice to Edith Wharton’, in *Edmund Wilson: Literary Essays and Reviews of the 1930s and 1940s*, ed. by Lewis M. Dabney (New York: Library of America, 2007), pp.405-17; also see Melissa M. Pennell, ‘Justice to Edith Wharton? The Early Critical Response’, in *Edith Wharton in Context*, ed. by Laura Rattray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp.93-102 (p.94).

⁶ Benstock, ‘Edith Wharton’, pp.43-5.

Lubbock fell out after his marriage to Lady Sybil Cutting and were never reconciled.⁷ Failing to match the generosity of Wharton's autobiographical account, one that portrays an enduringly amicable relationship between them, Lubbock was an unfortunate choice of first biographer.⁸ He established her character as cold and remote and his patronising tone diminished her posthumous reputation as a writer (*EW*, p.644).⁹ In Lubbock's words, Wharton was 'accustomed to see gifts laid before her', and 'the way of approach to her [...] [was] up a red carpet [...] in a strong light, to a spot where you might, but after all might not, be pressed to take a seat beside her'.¹⁰ He had 'never seen a writer in our old world who kept such state as she did', and reported her as being consciously cruel to those outside her own 'neatly rounded world'.¹¹ His most spiteful contention related to her ability as a writer, implicitly comparing her to Henry James (1843-1916) when he cast her as James' creation rather than his equal, and belittling her skill. He suggested that, if Wharton had been a James novel, 'she did him credit; his eye could find no fault. All this was much more than her pretty little talent, the handful of clever little fictions of her own'.¹² I return later in this chapter to Lubbock's motives, but the shadows cast by his account of Wharton would prove to be long. Katherine Joslin and Deborah Hecht commented independently on the damaging influence of his *Portrait of Edith Wharton* (1947) in the decades between her death and the opening of her archive, as well as on later scholarship.¹³ As Hecht said, 'anyone who has studied and wished to write about Edith Wharton has felt the need to consult Percy Lubbock's work. Lubbock, after all, knew his subject personally'.¹⁴

However, in 1968 interest in the novelist was revitalised by the opening of her archive.¹⁵ There scholars encountered a woman of privilege and determination, but also one who was more spirited, conflicted and complicated than posthumous renditions, such as Lubbock's, allowed. Wharton, scholars could start to appreciate, was a woman caught in a painful marriage, conducting a fiery extra-marital affair, and unafraid of penning an erotic tale that would have scandalised her readers. There, in short, was a woman whose reputation was being overturned and who, in a twist of irony, was about to be 'rediscovered' as part of feminist activism – something that would have elicited nothing short of hostility from Wharton herself.¹⁶

⁷ Hermione Lee, *Edith Wharton* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2007), pp.644-6.

⁸ Edith Wharton, *A Backward Glance* (London: Constable and Company Ltd, 1962).

⁹ Also see Katherine Joslin, *Women Writers: Edith Wharton* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), p.137.

¹⁰ Percy Lubbock, *Portrait of Edith Wharton* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1947), p.18.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp.18, 36.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.15.

¹³ Deborah Hecht, 'The Poisoned Well: Percy Lubbock and Edith Wharton', *The American Scholar*, 62 (1993), 255-9; Katherine Joslin, 'Edith Wharton at 125', *College Literature*, 14 (1987), 193-206.

¹⁴ Hecht, p.255.

¹⁵ Bell, 'Introduction', p.12.

¹⁶ Knights, *Cambridge*, p.130.

2. Wharton's reputation and women

Scholarly understandings of a particular component of Wharton's reputation, her attitude towards women and their empowerment or her 'feminism', are ambiguous and contested, and this fact underpins my work in this thesis. Informed by what she herself had expressed about women, placed consistently at the core of her fiction, by what others wrote about her after her death, and finally by the astonishing contents of her archive, Wharton's position with regards to women is complicated to say the least. Her status as a leading woman writer conspicuously silent on women's rights as sought by the suffrage movement of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, remains a paradox. Nonetheless, second-wave feminist readings of Wharton (from the Women's Liberation movement of the 1960s onwards), such as that of Margaret McDowell, emphasised the writer's concern with marriage from a woman's perspective and changing views about divorce and extra-marital affairs.¹⁷ Elizabeth Ammons highlighted Wharton's engagement with 'the Woman Question' and the continued oppression of women.¹⁸ Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar argued that Wharton criticised the position of women in America. For them, what 'James saw as a hellish country because it was in the grip of a "feminine, a nervous, hysterical, chattering, canting age", Wharton saw as specifically a hell for women, a hell whose discontents arose directly from a debilitating feminization'.¹⁹ According to Susan Goodman, commentators like Ammons, McDowell and Carol Wershoven emphasised the isolation and competitiveness among Wharton's women.²⁰ Discussing Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905), Wershoven noticed how the 'perpetual competition with one another for the best marital deal [...] makes every woman [...] a potential enemy of every other' in her set.²¹ Goodman herself explored Wharton's heroines as attempting 'to define themselves through connections with other women'.²² Elaine Showalter considered her reworking of existing fictional plots for women as part of a broader 'transitional phase in women's history and women's writing' at the end of the Victorian era, 'characterized by unhappy endings, as novelists struggled with the problem of going beyond the allowable limits and breaking through the available histories and stories for women'.²³ Finally, Joslin commented on Wharton's 'consistently theorised feminist perspective on women's writing and culture'.²⁴

¹⁷ Margaret B. McDowell, *Edith Wharton* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1976), p.86.

¹⁸ Elizabeth Ammons, *Edith Wharton's Argument with America* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1980), pp.48-9; also see Jessica Schubert McCarthy, 'Modern Critical Receptions', in *Edith Wharton in Context*, ed. by Laura Rattray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp.103-13 (pp.103-4).

¹⁹ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, 'Angel of Devastation: Edith Wharton on the Arts of the Enslaved', in *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century*, Vol. II (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), pp.123-68 (p.126).

²⁰ Susan Goodman, *Edith Wharton's Women: Friends and Rivals* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1990), p.3.

²¹ Carol Wershoven, *The Female Intruder in the Novels of Edith Wharton* (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1982), p.56

²² Goodman, *Edith*, p.3.

²³ Elaine Showalter, 'The Death of the Lady (Novelist): Wharton's *House of Mirth*', in Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth*, ed. by Elizabeth Ammons (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990), pp.357-72 (p.359); also see Knights, *Cambridge*, p.131.

²⁴ Joslin, *Women Writers*, p.9; also see Knights, *Cambridge*, p.131.

By the late 1980s James Tuttleton went so far as to identify a ‘feminist takeover’ of the novelist, although in a 1996 editorial Cynthia Griffin Wolff argued that Wharton’s treatment of ‘the woman problem’ is always considered against the backdrop of a broader social issue and that it works for change for men as well as women.²⁵ In 2003 Benstock noticed Wharton’s concern over financial matters and women’s independence, society’s exacting standards of female beauty, and the psychological and intellectual cost to women whose development is socially restricted, while Diane Chambers’ 2009 volume, entitled *Feminist Readings of Edith Wharton: From Silence to Speech*, showed that feminist interest in Wharton has continued.²⁶ Chambers traced Wharton’s growing voice and prominence as a writer, a woman engaged in what was traditionally viewed as the activity of men.²⁷ In a few instances her account made passing reference to the secrecy surrounding Wharton’s writing practice, but without pursuing the theme.²⁸ She examined primarily the novelist’s narrative structures and themes in a selection of texts published between 1905 and 1922 to demonstrate the silencing of women by men who are compelled to control the story.²⁹ And yet throughout the process of Wharton’s feminist recasting, commentators remained ambivalent over Wharton’s treatment of her women, an inconsistency that invites further enquiry of the kind that I offer in this thesis.

During the 1970s and 1980s feminist commentators continued to question whether Wharton could be viewed as an early feminist writer, whether she even ‘like[d] women’, a notion that may be traced back to Lubbock’s assertion that the novelist did not get along with other women.³⁰ McDowell viewed ‘the exact nature of Edith Wharton’s feminism [as] resist[ing] easy definition’, while Gilbert and Gubar – drawing on Wharton’s autobiography, but also those of others, including Lubbock – asserted that she was ‘emphatically not a feminist in the ordinary sense of the word’.³¹ In 1987, noting that Wharton herself ‘did more than stretch’, in fact ‘defied’, convention as pertaining to women, Marilyn French asked why she never afforded her heroines the freedoms that she herself experienced, while the novelist’s ‘ingrained sadness’ still prevented her inclusion on the ‘standard [...] list of women reformers and feminists’ for Martha Banta.³² These criticisms do not appear so far removed

²⁵ Cynthia Griffin Wolff, ‘Edith Wharton and the Ladies’ Matinee’, *Edith Wharton Review*, 13 (1996), 1, 38-40 (p.40); James W. Tuttleton, ‘The Feminist Takeover of Edith Wharton’, *New Criterion*, (1989), 6-14.

²⁶ Benstock, ‘Edith Wharton’, pp.35, 43; Diane Chambers, *Feminist Readings of Edith Wharton: From Silence to Speech* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

²⁷ Chambers, *Feminist Readings*, pp.13, 23.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.37, 40, 152, 156.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.23-4, 153-4.

³⁰ Knights, *Cambridge*, p.130; also see Joslin, *Women Writers*, p.137; Lubbock, p.35; Janet Malcolm, ‘The Woman Who Hated Women’, *The New York Times Book Review*, (1986), 11.

³¹ Gilbert and Gubar, ‘Angel of Devastation’, p.126; Margaret B. McDowell, ‘Viewing the Custom of Her Country: Edith Wharton’s Feminism’, *Contemporary Literature*, 15 (1974), 521-38 (p.523).

³² Martha Banta, ‘Wharton’s Women: In Fashion, In History, Out of Time’, in *A Historical Guide to Edith Wharton*, ed. by Carol J. Singley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp.51-87 (p.81); Marilyn French, ‘Muzzled Women’, *College Literature*, 14 (1987), 219-29 (pp.223-4).

from comments published in *The Dial* in 1920, regarding Wharton's lack of attention to female emancipation, or Blake Nevius' emphasis three decades later on her seemingly unsympathetic portrayal of women outside her own social sphere; at times, Wharton heroines are indeed demonstrably manipulative and cruel.³³

In a 2012 column for *The New Yorker* Jonathan Franzen, apparently oblivious to his own misogyny, claimed outrageously that the combination of Wharton's privilege and lack of 'good looks and the feminine charm' accounted for her failure to attract sympathy, that 'as if aware of what an unlikable figure she herself cut, she placed unlikable women in the foreground of these novels'.³⁴ Post-1968 biographical accounts of Wharton established her as rather more 'likeable' than Franzen acknowledged. She had a varied and devoted circle of male as well as female friends, among them her childhood governess, Anna Bahlmann, the executrix of her will, Elisina Tyler, and the professional writer, Vernon Lee (1856-1935) (*EW*, p.97). More than a year after their deaths in 1933 she would continue to mourn the loss of her housekeeper Catherine Gross and chambermaid Elise Devinck, without whom life seemed 'a hollow business'.³⁵ Both women had been with Wharton for decades; Gross, or 'Grossie', joined her staff in 1884, and Devinck did so in 1914 (*EW*, p.705). Other commentators have provided more textured, scholarly readings of Wharton's position towards women. One constant in her writing for Banta was that, regardless of context, women are unable to escape from unsatisfactory marriages, but she also highlighted Wharton's preoccupation with women and their changing status at various times in history.³⁶ Ammons acknowledged Wharton's apparent inability to write a happy New Woman, a term coined by Sarah Grand in 1894 to refer to the intelligent, self-sufficient woman that replaced the Victorian stereotype at the end of the nineteenth century (*EWA*, p.48).³⁷ However, she attributed this to the novelist's recognition of the cultural restrictions on women at the time (*EWA*, p.48).

Still, the fact remains that during her lifetime Wharton was outspokenly, undeniably negative about the New Woman. She borrowed from John Knox to refer to 'emancipated' women as the 'monstrous regiment', 'young women taught by their elders to despise the kitchen and the linen room, and to substitute the acquiring of University degrees for the more complex art of civilized living', and asserted that women were 'made for pleasure &

³³ Blake Nevius, *Edith Wharton: A Study of her Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953); Charles K. Trueblood, 'Edith Wharton', *The Dial*, 68 (1920), 80-90 (p.80); also see Showalter, 'The Death', pp.365-7.

³⁴ Jonathan Franzen, 'A Rooting Interest: Edith Wharton and the Problem of Sympathy', *The New Yorker*, 88 (2012), 60-5 <<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/02/13/a-rooting-interest>> [accessed 16 December 2016].

³⁵ *Cuaderno Dello Studente*. Series V, Box 51, Folder 1523.

³⁶ Banta, p.70.

³⁷ Sarah Grand, 'The New Aspect of the Woman Question', *The North American Review*, 158 (1894), 270-6 (p.271).

procreation' even if she herself failed to engage in these activities (*ABG*, p.60; *EW*, p.606).³⁸ Was she proclaiming her manifesto on women, or paying lip service to convention as her writing quietly questioned the *status quo*? It is noteworthy that Wharton's ambivalence towards the New Woman was not unique, a trend that Martha Patterson attributed to the latter's controversial image and female writers seeking security within the literary marketplace.³⁹ Ammons argued while Wharton was unwilling to create happy New Women, she also wrote against her predecessor, the American Girl of the 1880s, as conceived by James and William Dean Howells (1837-1920).⁴⁰ Patterson described the American Girl as 'naïve' and 'pert', the New Woman as 'savvy' and 'statuesque [...] in the marketplace'.⁴¹ Indeed, Ammons stated that, for Wharton, the American Girl was the 'nation's failure, the human victim of a deluded obsession with innocence', and that such innocence 'diminished humanity for women'.⁴² Instead, Wharton chose to write women who were 'complicated, flawed, sensual, curious, and creative'.⁴³ Her heroines were to be 'less afraid of strong feelings, passions and risks'.⁴⁴ In short, they were to be real, to the extent of sometimes seeming monstrous to contemporary audiences expecting the noble American Girl, and disappointing those expecting the New Woman.

3. Examining Wharton's 'feminism' via secrets and silences

In this thesis I aim to question and extend existing thinking about Wharton's contested 'feminism', to investigate both its existence and shape, by examining and recontextualising two connected and previously little explored elements in her writing: silences and secrets. I explore how they are used to portray women, their public and personal interactions, and their development as characters. In 1976 Adrienne Rich (1929-2012) wrote that '[i]n a world where language and naming are power, silence is oppression, is violence'.⁴⁵ And in the following year Audre Lorde (1934-1992) declared that in

the cause of silence, each one of us draws the face of her own fear – fear of contempt, of censure, or some judgment, or recognition, of challenge, of annihilation. But most of all, I think, we fear the visibility without which we cannot truly live.⁴⁶

These two ideas encapsulate feminism's concern with the silences and silencing of women. They reflect the silencing of women by men, and by women who themselves accept that, as

³⁸ John Knox, *First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (Geneva: J. Crespin, 1558).

³⁹ Martha H. Patterson, *Beyond the Gibson Girl: Reimagining the American New Woman, 1895-1915* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), p.4.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.15.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Elizabeth Ammons, 'Cool Diana and the Blood-Red Muse: Edith Wharton on Innocence and Art', in Edith Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*, ed. by Candace Waid (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003), pp.433-47 (pp.437, 439).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.440.

⁴⁴ Edith Wharton, 'The New Frenchwoman', in Edith Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*, ed. by Candace Waid (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003), pp.288-96 (p.295).

⁴⁵ Adrienne Rich, *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979), p.204.

⁴⁶ Audre Lorde, *The Cancer Journals: Special Edition* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1997), pp.19-20.

Janis Stout noted, '[t]he proper woman – in the past and still, or at least until very recently – is the quiet one'.⁴⁷ In terms of women's writing, Tillie Olsen called this the 'acceptance – against one's experienced reality – of the sexist notion that the act of creation is not as inherently natural to a woman as to a man'.⁴⁸ Building on Jacques Derrida's criticism of phallocentrism, Gilbert and Gubar scrutinised the impact of the notion that 'the pen is a metaphorical penis', or the long tradition of the male author, on literary women.⁴⁹ Quoting Marge Piercy, they considered the anxieties of the first women writers and their descendants who dared take up the pen themselves, and the complex process of '[u]nlearning to not speak'.⁵⁰ In a radical gesture, Ursula Le Guin explained her own speaking by claiming to be a man, despite owning three bras and having been pregnant five times.⁵¹ In this thesis, I engage with the traditional view of female silencing, but also explore how silence may signal a refusal to consent, as well as resistance or empowerment, in a context that privileged male over female speech, as suggested by commentators such as Stout, Leland Person, Patricia Laurence, Barbara Johnson, and Mary Dalton and Kirsten Fatzinger.⁵² Diane Chambers also gestured towards this use of silence, remarking on the 'rich tradition of women's stories about women who manage to tell their stories using irony, deceptiveness, and even silence'.⁵³ While some see the silence of *The House of Mirth*'s Lily Bart as an inability to speak, others view it as a strategy of expression.⁵⁴ To increase scholarly understanding and widen appreciation of Wharton's complicated attitude towards women, I explore whether she muzzled her female characters because she thought that they should not speak, as traditional feminism might argue, or if she perhaps used silences and restraint to emphasise their often-overlooked strength, influence and independence as she indicted a society that refuses women the freedom of expression it grants men. I also investigate Wharton's non-fictional writing which often sees her perform the role of selective silence-breaker, even as she variously admires and critiques the silences of others.

⁴⁷ Janis P. Stout, *Strategies of Reticence: Silence and Meaning in the Works of Jane Austen, Willa Cather, Katherine Anne Porter, and Joan Didion* (London: University Press of Virginia, 1990), p.11.

⁴⁸ Tillie Olsen, *Silences* (New York: Delacorte Press/Seymour Lawrence, 1978), p.30.

⁴⁹ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p.7; Susan Gubar, "'The Blank Page' and the Issues of Female Creativity', *Critical Enquiry*, 8 (1981), 243-63 (p.247).

⁵⁰ Gilbert and Gubar, *Madwoman*, p.83.

⁵¹ Ursula Le Guin, *The Wave in the Mind: Talks and Essays on the Writer, the Reader and the Imagination* (Boston: Shambhala, 2004), p.3.

⁵² Mary M. Dalton and Kirsten James Fatzinger, 'Choosing Silence: Defiance and Resistance Without Voice in Jane Campion's *The Piano*', *Women and Language*, 26 (2003), 34-9; Barbara Johnson, *The Feminist Difference: Literature, Psychoanalysis, Race, and Gender* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1998); Patricia Laurence, 'Women's Silence as a Ritual of Truth: A Study of Literary Expressions in Austen, Brontë and Woolf', in *Listening to Silences: New Essays in Feminist Criticism*, ed. by Elaine Hedges and Shelley Fisher Fishkin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp.157-67; Patricia Oudek Laurence, *The Reading of Silence: Virginia Woolf in the English Tradition* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1991); Leland S. Person, 'Hester's Revenge: The Power of Silence in *The Scarlet Letter*', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 43 (1989), 465-83; Stout, 1990.

⁵³ Chambers, *Feminist Readings*, p.24.

⁵⁴ Elizabeth Alsop, 'Refusal to Tell: Withholding Heroines in Hawthorne, Wharton, and Coetzee', *College Literature*, 39 (2012), 84-105 (p.102); 'Showalter, "The Death"', p.361.

In addition to silences, I employ secrets as a critical lens in my thesis. Current literary enquiry into Wharton fails to address the role of secrets and concealment that feature large in her fiction (*EW*, p.11). Wharton, James and Joseph Conrad (1857-1924) not only knew each other, but also read and commented on each other's writing, their work occasionally drawing direct comparison.⁵⁵ Yet while secrets in James' and Conrad's writing have received close scrutiny, the same cannot be said for the numerous and varied secrets in Wharton's work.⁵⁶ This is an oversight in need of rectification. The number of Wharton's female characters who withhold information raises significant questions about the relationship between gender and secrecy in her work that I examine in this thesis, so shedding further light on her 'feminism'.

Secrets that are known, knowable, discovered, discoverable, cherished, exploited, shared or hidden, are fundamental to Wharton's style, structure and concerns as a writer. Her writing pivots around disclosure and resistance and the tension that exists between these extremes, whether it involves the lives of a segment of polite society or those on the margins of society, the decoration of houses or designs of gardens, or landscapes at the heart or frontiers of her world. Wharton, who valued personal privacy above all else, makes an occupation out of revelation. The canonical status of her male contemporaries explains interest in their writing, while the subject matter of their fiction and its occasional cross-over with the novelists' biographies – consider the opaqueness of James' sexuality or Conrad's mental health – are seen to justify particular attentiveness to the nature and role of secrets in their works.⁵⁷ However, Wharton's own literary legacy is at least as substantial as James' or Conrad's and justifies significant scholarly interest, while her archive attests to a private life that was considerably more complex, often fraught, and secretive, than previously imagined by biographers (*EW*, p.752).⁵⁸ An accurate assessment of Wharton's treatment of women

⁵⁵ For example, William Lyons Phelps, 'As Mrs. Wharton Sees Us', in Edith Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*, ed. by Candace Waid (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003), pp.382-6 (p.385); also see Shafquat Towheed, ed., *The Correspondence of Edith Wharton and Macmillan, 1901-1930* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp.173-4, 193-4.

⁵⁶ For example, Loyd Davis, 'Sexual Secrets and Social Knowledge: Henry James's *The Sacred Fount*', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 26 (1998), 321-35; Robert Hampson, *Conrad's Secrets* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Frank Kermode, 'Secrets and Narrative Sequence', *Critical Inquiry*, 7 (1980), 83-101; Manfred Mackenzie, 'Communities of Knowledge: Secret Society in Henry James', *ELH*, 39 (1972), 147-68; Deborah McLeod, 'Disturbing the Silence: Sound Imagery in Conrad's *The Secret Agent*', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 33 (2009), 117-31; George Monteiro, 'The Secret in Henry James' Late Stories', *American Literary Realism*, 44 (2012), 174-6; Stephan Mussil, 'A Secret in Spite of Itself: Recursive Meaning in Henry James's *The Figure in the Carpet*', *New Literary History*, 39 (2008), 769-99; Nina Pelikan Strauss, 'The Exclusion of the Intended from Secret Sharing in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*', *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 20 (1987), 123-37; Diane, G. Scholl, 'Secret Paternity in James's *The Aspern Papers*: Whose Letters?', *Modern Philology*, 111 (2013), 72-87; Alex Segal, 'Deconstruction, Radical Secrecy, and *The Secret Agent*', *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, 54 (2008), 189-208; Hana Voisine-Jechova, 'Le Secret de la Vieille Dame: A. S. Puškin et Henry James', *Revue de Littérature Comparée*, 69 (1995), 263-71; Judith Weissman, 'Antique Secrets in Henry James', *The Sewanee Review*, 93 (1985), 196-215.

⁵⁷ For example, Hampson, pp.14-5; Eric Haralson, *Henry James and Queer Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁵⁸ Bell, 'Introduction', p.4; for example, Shari Benstock, *No Gifts from Chance: A Biography of Edith Wharton* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1994); R.W.B. Lewis, *Edith Wharton: A Biography* (London: Constable, 1975); Irene Goldman-Price, ed., *My Dear Governess: The Letters of Edith Wharton to Anna Bahlmann* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012); Cynthia Griffin Wolff, *A Feast of Words: The Triumph of Edith Wharton* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1995).

depends on a critical re-reading of her use of secrets, no less prevalent or erudite than that of her male contemporaries, and regularly associated with her fictional heroines.

Currently Wharton is enjoying a period of particularly high critical standing. *The Complete Works of Edith Wharton* series was launched in 2016; new directions characterise contemporary Wharton studies; unknown works by Wharton are still being discovered, such as the play, *The Shadow of a Doubt*, and appreciation for the diversity of genres in which she wrote is growing. She is also attracting plenty of popular interest, as demonstrated by television and cinematic adaptations of *The Custom of the Country* by Christopher Hampton that are underway and a 2018 episode of Radio 4's *In Our Time* devoted to Wharton.⁵⁹ However, none of this recent attention has focused on what I argue here to be central and neglected themes in her work; my study is able to benefit from this resurgence of interest while offering a timely contribution to Wharton scholarship.

II. BIOGRAPHICAL AND AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SECRETS AND SILENCES

1. Wharton and secrets

This consideration of the secrets of Wharton's life starts with the influence of Gaillard Lapsley (1871-1949), her long-time friend and literary executor, and Percy Lubbock on understandings of her work and literary influence. This is because their initial management of Wharton's posthumous reputation as a writer and a woman suppressed and distorted what was known about her for decades. The severe tone of Wharton's earliest biography, Lubbock's *Portrait of Edith Wharton*, resulted partly from his conscious omission of her voice. He chose to disregard those letters by Wharton that were available at the time, opting instead to construct his biography around invited recollections of her often non-literary friends.⁶⁰ R.W.B. Lewis recorded how when a friend remarked that the account 'had the air of having been written by someone who loathed Edith Wharton, Lubbock struck his forehead with both hands and exclaimed, "But I *adored* her!"', demonstrating that while his old antagonism could not be suppressed, his motives may not have been entirely dishonourable (*EWB*, p.516).⁶¹ Letters exchanged after Wharton's death between Lubbock and Lapsley suggest that Lubbock's approach was misguided – and lacking in self-awareness – rather than knowingly damaging. He aimed to encourage contributors to 'write freely and frankly, even indiscreetly' about his subject.⁶² It seems that in his desire to

⁵⁹ Mary Chinery and Laura Rattray, 'The Shadow of a Doubt: Discovering a New Work by Edith Wharton', *Edith Wharton Review*, 33 (2017), 88-112; 'Edith Wharton', *In Our Time*, BBC Radio 4, 4 October 2018 <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0000ml8>> [accessed 24 August 2020]; Meredith Goldsmith, 'Editor's Note', *Edith Wharton Review*, 32 (2016), v-vi; Carol Singley, ed., *The Complete Works of Edith Wharton* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019-) <<https://whartoncompleteworks.org>> [accessed 17 May 2021].

⁶⁰ Joslin, *Women Writers*, p.129.

⁶¹ Also see Lubbock, p.vi.

⁶² Lubbock to Lapsley, 22 December 1937. Series XI, Box 65, Folder 1795.

provide a candid portrait of Wharton, Lubbock wrote one that was unintentionally, overly harsh. His reason for depending on the recollections of others, rather than on Wharton's own words, was that

she never really got herself into her letters – never really talked in them with the sound of her voice – never brought one her actual company in her letters [...]. Or rather she did at times, but only in times and circumstances of entire privacy, where there could be no question of publication.⁶³

The only way to square Lubbock's professed desire to protect Wharton's privacy with his invitation for frankness is to accept that he appointed himself as the arbiter of what was to be printed about her life, thus imbuing her posthumous reputation with secrets and silences. Their effect was exacerbated by the tone of bitter resentment running throughout the biography.

The thirty-year embargo placed on the publication of biographical information when Wharton's papers were sent to Yale University in 1938 further compounded the long-term influence of Lubbock's *Portrait*, with many more particulars of her life remaining secret until 1968. Yale president Charles Seymour confirmed to Lapsley the university's willingness to provide 'careful housing and protection', 'that the correspondence and biographical material will not be accessible for a period of years, roughly corresponding to a generation', and that Wharton's manuscripts 'will be accessible only to bona fide students of literature and that none of the unpublished material be published until the copyright expires'; he agreed also to 'the necessity of guarding against the danger that the material might fall into incompetent or unwise hands in the meantime'.⁶⁴ The collection delivered to Yale by Lapsley largely comprised letters that Wharton had received, but subsequently her correspondence to others was added. The latter included letters to Lapsley himself, as well as to Sara (Sally) Norton, Mary (Minnie) Cadwalader Jones, Margaret (Daisy) Chanler and John Hugh Smith – all long-time friends of Wharton (*EWB*, p.549).⁶⁵

Wharton's own attempts to curate her reputation by withholding and controlling autobiographical information unwittingly exacerbated the skewing influence of Lubbock and Lapsley's decisions after her death; her highly selective 1934 autobiography, *A Backward Glance* represents the authorised account of her own life. With a view to her posthumous

⁶³ Lubbock to Lapsley, 14 November 1937. Series VII, Box 59, Folder 1701.

⁶⁴ Seymour to Lapsley, 22 February 1938. Series XI, Box 65, Folder 1795.

⁶⁵ Wharton and the slightly younger Lapsley, whom she met through James, were friends for more than thirty years (*EW*, pp.246-7). The relationship between Sara Norton, daughter of the American art historian Charles Eliot Norton, and Wharton represented one of several enduring bonds in her life formed in the 1900s (*EW*, pp.71, 94). Mary Jones, Wharton's sister-in-law, remained a pivotal figure in her life even after her marriage to Frederic Jones had ended; she was, as Lee puts it, 'Edith's collaborator, dogs-body, confidante, correspondent and admirer' (*EW*, p.39). Margaret Chanler and Edith Wharton knew one another as children and teenagers, but the friendship only blossomed when they met again as adults and in later years they would often travel together (*EW*, p.37). John Hugh Smith, who knew Lubbock at Cambridge, met Wharton in 1908. The young Englishman's youthful admiration of Wharton turned into another of her lasting, affectionate friendships (*EW*, pp.248-9).

reputation, she also tried to control the preservation and destruction of her personal written correspondence. Curiously, however, in her final years she seemed to rethink her lifelong reserve and made some arrangements to allow deeper insight into her history after her death (*EWB*, p.xii). After considering Wharton's attempts to control her reputation and the suppression of information involved in that process, I turn to the two principal biographies published following the opening of her papers in 1968, by Lewis and Cynthia Griffin Wolff. Finally I focus on the most recent biographical addition to Wharton scholarship, written by Hermione Lee. I show these biographers' unique approaches by exploring their treatment of Wharton's secrets – I focus on a slightly different selection of secrets occurring in each of the three biographies – as well as the richness of their accounts that results from liberal access to the details of her life.

1.1. *Wharton's autobiography*

To quote Lee, Wharton's autobiography is 'an impressively evasive exercise in good manners and self-screening' (*EW*, p.709). Motivated by concerns over posthumous biographical inaccuracies, Wharton's plans for an autobiography, first conceived in 1923, involved writing her 'own early memories from 1865 to 1885 or 1890' and interweaving (her word) her childhood recollections and the start of her 'literary life'.⁶⁶ This intention broadened over the decade it took to write the published book. Her working title, 'Reminiscences', expressed the aim to record "'spots of time" [following Wordsworth] or central memories', while the final work exhibits 'a more structured narration of recalled events within different contexts often associated with place' that implicitly defends 'the now extinct culture that produced her'.⁶⁷ This reading of Wharton's autobiography by Goodman corresponds at least in part with that of Janet Beer, who interpreted it as an 'account of that which the 70-year-old-writer wished to memorialize about the society from which she came and which she subsequently adapted to her own purposes'.⁶⁸ Taking its title from the introductory chapter to Walt Whitman's *November Boughs* (1888), it does not quite 'sit gossiping in the early candle-light of old age', but glances backward selectively over travelled roads.⁶⁹ The detail of her private ritual of 'making up', her childhood story-telling process, and reference to her 'secret sensitiveness to the landscape [...] that was tremblingly and inarticulately awake to every detail of wind-warped fern and wide-eyed briar rose' demonstrate a capacity for intense emotion that *A Backward Glance* may from thereon register but seldom again lays bare (*ABG*, pp.33-5, 54). Examination of Wharton's textual

⁶⁶ R.W.B. Lewis and Nancy Lewis, eds, *The Letters of Edith Wharton* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988), p.456.

⁶⁷ Susan Goodman, "'Justice" to Edith Wharton's *A Backward Glance*', *Arizona Quarterly*, 73 (2017), 93-115 (p.96).

⁶⁸ Janet Beer, *Edith Wharton* (London: Northcote House, 2002), p.17.

⁶⁹ Walt Whitman, 'A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads', in *November Boughs* (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1888), pp.5-18 (p.5).

interventions is instructive with regard to the reticence of her autobiography. In the undated, corrected holograph manuscript the phrase ‘secret lisp’ was inserted to describe the sound of arbutus buds in the spring woods near Mamaroneck, and so too the word ‘secret’ to describe her reading practice as ‘a secret ecstasy of communion’, before explaining her choice of adjective:

The child knows instinctively when it will be understood, and from the first I kept my adventures with books to myself. But perhaps it was not only the “misunderstood” element, so common in meditative infancy, that kept me from talking of my discoveries. There was in me a secret retreat where I wished no one to intrude, or at least no one whom I had yet encountered (p.70).⁷⁰

Wharton’s word choices repeatedly signal the value that she attaches to selective concealment. Numerous short episodes or longer periods in her life that caused her deep distress or delight, explored fully by her more recent biographers and discussed later in this section, are excluded from her own official reminiscences in which Beer identified a ‘relentless urge towards the positive’.⁷¹

Goodman said that ‘Wharton cracks open a door here and there before barring it against those associating authenticity and candor with “sensational” revelation’, even as she argued that Wharton’s autobiography offers readers access to her intelligence and imagination in its stead, and ‘invites them to align themselves with the values *A Backward Glance* advances – taste, discretion, civility’.⁷² In this it is comparable to Rudyard Kipling’s (1865-1936) *Something of Myself* (1937) that entirely omits any mention of what Thomas Pinney called Kipling’s personal crises, including youthful relationships, physical and mental illnesses, and the loss of two children.⁷³ In addition to these ‘merely factual omissions’, the ‘omission to describe his interior life is even more obvious’, although unsurprising in a man fiercely protective of his privacy.⁷⁴ There is one noteworthy difference between Kipling’s and Wharton’s autobiographies. His was published posthumously under the editorship of Mrs Kipling, while Wharton herself oversaw publication of her autobiography in her usual exacting manner, controlling what appeared in print and how it did so, and never overstepping the social rules that had governed her youth (see further down for details). Wharton and Kipling’s autobiographies resemble more closely the Victorian form of the genre that eschews the ‘plot of romantic love and marriage’, ‘include[s] sizable components of memoirs’ focusing on social and historical context instead of private life and self-reflection, and while genuine in content, ‘may legitimately conceal (and are expected to

⁷⁰ *A Backward Glance* corrected holograph manuscript. Series I, Box 2, Folders 27-28.

⁷¹ Beer, p.18.

⁷² Goodman, “Justice”, p.100.

⁷³ Rudyard Kipling, *Something of Myself For My Friends Known and Unknown* (London: Macmillan, 1937); Thomas Pinney, ‘Introduction’, in Rudyard Kipling, *Something of Myself and Other Autobiographical Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp.vii-xxxv (p.xxii).

⁷⁴ Pinney, pp.xxii, xxiv.

conceal) many of the details of their personal lives and interior experience that is irrelevant to their place in society', than the modernist expressions that had long since superseded it.⁷⁵

In 1919 Wharton's contemporary, May Sinclair (1863-1946), drew on the principles of psychoanalysis, incorporated stream-of-consciousness narration, and questioned orthodox religion and traditional gender roles in her autobiographical novel, *Mary Olivier: A Life*.⁷⁶ By the time that *A Backward Glance* appeared in print, Gertrude Stein's (1874-1946) *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933) already embodied modernist approaches to autobiography⁷⁷. Georgia Johnston noted its 'impressionistic or associative temporal structure' directed by memory rather than chronology and Stein's characteristic voice included via reported conversations, but there is also the narrative voice of Alice Toklas herself, resulting in the work's singular 'doubled voicing'.⁷⁸ And from as early as 1907 until 1940 Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) created the five essays that Jeanne Schulkind would later edit into *Moments of Being: Autobiographical Writings* (1985).⁷⁹ Lee warned against treating the essays as a single work when they tell 'an overlapping story in different ways, with different motives, and over a long period of time'.⁸⁰ Yet she argued later that, as a collection, they are 'about inhibition, evasion and silence', and listed the things of which they do not speak: Woolf's 'breakdowns, her brother Adrian, the death of Thoby, her beginnings as a writer, her friendship with women', and her marriage.⁸¹ However, its reticence is not that of Wharton or Kipling. The final essay, 'Sketch of the Past', is life-writing about the challenges of life-writing and self-expression.⁸² Woolf is conscious of 'the innumerable things left out', as she devotes several pages to her mother's life, death, and the impact of the latter on herself.⁸³ Her account interrogates the reliability of her knowledge and memory of Julia Stephen, but still concludes that, when she died, 'everything had come to an end'.⁸⁴ She admits frankly that until her forties, 'the presence of my mother obsessed me. I could hear her voice, see her, imagine what she would do or say as I went about my day's doings'.⁸⁵ Yet she omits the pivotal detail of her own first mental illness, a breakdown

⁷⁵ Linda Anderson, *Autobiography* (London: Routledge, 2011), p.8; Clinton Machann, *The Genre of Autobiography in Victorian Literature* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), pp.8-10.

⁷⁶ Emma Domínguez-Rué, 'Pen-Is-Envy: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Woman Writer in May Sinclair's *Mary Olivier*', *Journal of Gender Studies*, 22 (2013), 152-65 (pp.153-5); George Johnson, 'May Sinclair: From Psychological Analyst to Anachronistic Modernist', *Journal of Evolutionary Psychology*, 25 (2004), 179-89 (pp.183-4); May Sinclair, *Mary Olivier: A Life* (New York: New York Review Books, 2002).

⁷⁷ Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (London: Penguin Books, 2001).

⁷⁸ Carolyn A. Barros, 'Getting Modern: *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*', *Biography*, 22 (1999), 177-208 (p.178); Georgia Johnston, 'Narratologies of Pleasure: Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*', *Georgia Modern Fiction Studies*, 42 (1996), 590-606 (p.591).

⁷⁹ Hermione Lee, 'Introduction', in Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being*, ed. by Jeanne Schulkind (London: Pimlico, 2002), pp.vii-xv (pp.xi-xii).

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.xi.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.xiv.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp.xiv-xv.

⁸³ Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being*, ed. by Jeanne Schulkind (London: Pimlico, 2002), p.91.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.96.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p.92.

mentioned in an earlier version of the essay, occurring around the same time as her mother's death.⁸⁶

Despite their differences, each of these approaches shows that autobiography, like any other form of writing, is constructed, and relies on fictional techniques. The main protagonist becomes the writer's creation and reflection. Sally Cline and Carole Angier's handbook on life writing gives prominence to Paul John Eakin's opinion that the autobiographical self is 'a fictive construct. A fictional protagonist articulated in a quasi-fiction'.⁸⁷ Judith Fryer drew attention to Wharton's use of photographs in her autobiography so that what 'we see, visually, is what Wharton wishes us to see: the self she presents is the "feminine *me*" of the word pictures, laces, bows, furs and gloves very much in evidence'.⁸⁸ She viewed *A Backward Glance* as Wharton's 'last public performance: choosing actors, set, language, she can call us back to witness the presentation of a final, perfected version of her life'.⁸⁹ Benstock privileged the gaps in the text to make a similar point: 'thus one discovers the lapses, silences, and gaps in this autobiography to be revealing of a life that consistently wrote a fiction of itself'.⁹⁰ I suggest that learning how to give a suitable public performance, often dependent on self-censorship and its attendant gaps and omissions, was an important aspect of Wharton's childhood that served her well throughout her life.

Edith Newbold Jones, later Wharton, was born to George Frederic Jones (1821-1882) and Lucretia Stevens Rhineland Jones (1824-1901) during the American Civil War and would, for all intents and purposes, grow up an only child. Her eldest brother, Frederic Rhineland Jones (1846-1918) was sixteen years her senior, and her middle brother, Henry (Harry) Edwards Jones (1850-1922), twelve years (*EW*, p.830). The Joneses were members of Old New York, social aristocracy with colonial ancestry going back three centuries and an aura of intransience. Wharton recalls her childhood impression of this apparent fixedness in her autobiography: 'the group in which I grew up was like an empty vessel into which no new wine would ever again be poured' (*ABG*, pp.5, 9). The Jones household was, above all, decorous, and Wharton's autobiographical writing often pauses over people that were not to be fraternised with, books that were not to be read, or topics that were not to be discussed in her youth. 'Life and I', an unpublished draft of what was to become *A Backward Glance*, describes how Wharton failed repeatedly to obtain sexual advice from her mother. Refusing

⁸⁶ See Schulkind's note on 'Sketch of the Past,' reproduced in Appendix B of Woolf, *Moments*, p.176.

⁸⁷ Sally Cline and Carole Angier, *The Arvon Book of Life Writing: Writing Biography, Autobiography and Memoir* (London: Methuen Drama, 2010), p.65.

⁸⁸ Judith Fryer, 'Edith Wharton's "Tact of Omission": Harmony and Proportion in *A Backward Glance*', *Biography*, 6 (1983), 148-69 (p.162).

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.166.

⁹⁰ Shari Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank: Paris, 1900-1940* (Austin: University of Texas, 1986), p.42.

to comply, Lucretia reacted with disapproving disgust to Edith's questions.⁹¹ This topic is omitted from *A Backward Glance*, but the autobiography does refer to two eccentric cousins as seemingly lighthearted examples of taboo subjects among the Joneses. George Alfred was brought low by '[s]ome woman', causing her mother to rearrange her expression and lower her voice whenever naming him, while Cousin Edmund imagined himself to be '*a bust of Napoleon*' in his later years (*ABG*, pp.23-4). Truths, such as that Alfred was an adulterer and swindler, are passed over (*EW*, p.30). As Wharton remarks on the extent to which life was censored in the Jones household, she herself self-censors. The silence surrounding her disputed paternity, broken engagement, fraught marriage, extramarital affair, divorce, and arguments with friends and family, only strengthens this impression. Speaking of such matters would have been exceptional for Wharton as a former, female, member of Old New York society. Naturally reticent, her desire for privacy was also behaviour learned during her youth and reflective of the mores and expectations of her social class. Those that surrounded her in later life – Lapsley, Lubbock, James – cherished the same behaviour and collectively tended towards the secrecy that characterises *A Backward Glance*. Its autobiographical omissions contrast conspicuously with the subject matter of Wharton's fiction which, as Jean Lutes remarked, 'repeatedly took up taboo topics, including divorce, extramarital sex, out-of-wedlock pregnancy, incest, and a mother who leaves her child to pursue her own sexual satisfaction'.⁹² Wharton was not afraid to tackle such topics in a professional capacity, but shied away from exposing their relevance to her own lived experiences, conceivably to protect her privacy and to maintain her unblemished reputation as a social commentator.

Wharton's engagement with secrecy and omission as a literary device is present in her biographical writing well before she tasted professional success. In 1888, three years after her marriage to Edward (Teddy) Wharton (1850-1928), the Whartons undertook a four-month-long cruise around the Aegean with her cousin-in-law, James Van Alen. Her journal of the voyage remained unknown until 1991, when Claudine Lesage discovered its typescript in a library in Hyères, France. Since published, *The Cruise of the Vanadis* (1992) records among other things a visit to the monastic state of Mount Athos that has existed since the Byzantine era, inhabited by monks connected to one of its numerous monasteries and hermitages, and to this day forbidden and thus secret to women and other female animals, including hens.⁹³ Wharton was able to persuade the captain of their yacht to approach the shoreline, but was prevented from disembarking and had to wait on board

⁹¹ Gloria C. Erlich, *The Sexual Education of Edith Wharton* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), pp.27-8.

⁹² Jean M. Lutes, 'Self-Made Women: Novelists of the 1920s', in *The Cambridge History of American Women's Literature*, ed. by Dale M. Bauer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) pp.422-45 (p.425).

⁹³ Edith Wharton, *The Cruise of the Vanadis* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), p.173.

while Teddy and Van Alen explored (CV, p.174; NG, p.66). She had read ‘Curzon and Tozer’ (CV, p.116) – presumably *A Visit to Monasteries in the Levant* (1849) and *The Monks of Mount Athos* (1862) respectively – and clearly quizzed her male companions after their return to the yacht. Despite having been unable to set foot on the mountain herself, her account of Mount Athos is informed; ‘[s]o little seems to be known about Mount Athos’, that she is determined to share its secrets, but not her own (CV, p.171). She never, for example, identifies her two travelling companions.⁹⁴ *The Cruise of the Vanadis* reveals the Aegean, not Wharton as she travels around it.

Wharton’s exclusion from Mount Athos may have fixed her interest in hermitism, as Benstock claims (NG, p.66). One of several references to the hermits of Mount Athos in her journal reads as follows:

as we drew near we saw that here and there, among the inaccessible ledges high overhead, hermitages clung like birds’ nests to the rocks. In some cases they are no more than little wooden sheds, with balconies which literally overhang the precipitous cliffs; in others a tiny patch of ground has been reclaimed and a white hut peeps out through olives and Judas-tree [...] and as we blew our whistle in passing a hermit appeared on each balcony with the promptitude of cuckoos in Swiss clocks when the hour strikes (CV, pp.178-9).

Wharton’s description of Mount Athos’ hermitages fuses the natural and religious world. Indeed, in order to withdraw entirely from secular life and to find absolute solitude and grace, her hermits chose to inhabit an extreme natural environment.

1.2. Wharton’s fiction, biography, and the Fullerton affair

Wharton was as wary of her fiction being read from a biographical perspective as she was of revelations in her autobiographical writing. ‘The Fulness of Life’ (1893) was written eight years into her marriage and published in *Scribner’s Magazine* in the same year, but it was omitted intentionally from her first short-story anthology, *The Greater Inclination* (1899), and never reprinted elsewhere (NG, pp.71-2). She refused the request of her editor at Charles Scribner’s Sons, Edward Burlingame, to include ‘The Fulness’ in this anthology. She wrote to him on 10 July 1898: ‘As to the old stories of which you speak so kindly, I regard them as the excesses of youth. They were all written “at the top of my voice,” & The Fulness of Life is one long shriek.–I may not write any better, but at least I hope that I write in a lower key, & I fear that the voice of those early tales will drown all the others: it is for that reason that I prefer not to publish them’ (LEW, p.36). ‘The Fulness’ is the tale of a dead woman, deciding whether to desert or remain with ‘the kind but loutish man she has married’ (EWA, pp.7-8). Wharton’s wish to silence her younger voice was an obvious effort at self-censorship. By

⁹⁴ Claudine Lesage, ‘Introduction’, in Edith Wharton, *The Cruise of the Vanadis* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), pp.19-24 (p.23).

1980, though, Wharton scholars were privy to her private papers and Ammons saw Wharton's husband, Teddy, in the 'kind but loutish man', and the '[i]mages of entrapment and isolation and of vague persecution' in a number of Wharton's stories as an indication of the novelist's own emotions near the turn of the nineteenth century (*EWA*, p.8).

'The Life Apart' or '*L'âme close*' straddles the genres of autobiography and fiction. Often referred to as Wharton's 'Love Diary', this text covers the 1907-1908 period of her affair with William Morton Fullerton (1865-1952).⁹⁵ Her desire for privacy and the appearance of propriety would have been good reasons for keeping the diary secret, but so too the fact that it could have given Teddy grounds to refuse their 1913 divorce. A reader of reports of divorce proceedings that often included love letters as evidence and a writer of fictional yet credible divorce plots, Wharton would have been all too aware of the threat posed by the diary and other written records as legal proof of her adultery (*FW*, p.147). On one hand, then, this was a private text, kept hidden during Wharton's lifetime due to its potentially explosive content. On the other, Meredith Benjamin argued persuasively that Wharton approached 'The Life Apart' like a 'consciously crafted' literary work with a 'hybrid form, unrestrained by genre boundaries', within 'a long tradition of women's diaries' that allowed them the freedom to address subjects that were otherwise prohibited.⁹⁶ The implication is that Wharton imagined some future audience for her diary. Elizabeth Podnieks, whose work Benjamin drew upon, suggested that the diary is 'not a more female than male space, but a more necessary and meaningful site for women than for men' because it functions as a 'subversive literary space for women'.⁹⁷ Women's diaries provided a platform for the exploration of subjects such as homosexuality, incest and adultery – taboos even in the early twentieth century when women's access to the literary marketplace became a given.⁹⁸

'The Life Apart' lays out Wharton's emotional response to her affair with Fullerton in all its complexity: her dreams ('I should like to be to you, friend of my heart, like a touch of wings brushing by you in the darkness, or like the scent of an invisible garden, that one passes on an unknown road at night...'), devotion and dependence ('Nothing else lives in me now but *you*—I have no conscious existence outside the thought of you, the feeling of you'), gratitude ('Oh, Life, Life, how I give thanks to you for this!'), and resentment ('Something gave me the impression the other day that we were watched in this house ... commented on.—Ah, how a great love needs to be a happy & open love! How degraded I feel by other

⁹⁵ See Susan Goodman, 'Portraits of Wharton', in *Edith Wharton in Context*, ed. by Laura Rattray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp.61-70 (p.61); Kenneth M. Price and Phyllis McBride, "'The Life Apart': Texts and Contexts of Edith Wharton's Love Diary", *American Literature*, 66 (1994), 663-88 (p.663).

⁹⁶ Meredith Benjamin, 'A Genre Apart: Considering Edith Wharton's "The Life Apart" in the Tradition of Women's Diaries', *Edith Wharton Review*, 28 (2012), 20-31 (p.24).

⁹⁷ Elizabeth Podnieks, *Daily Modernism: The Literary Diaries of Virginia Woolf, Antonia White, Elizabeth Smart, and Anaïs Nin* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), p.6.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

people's degrading thoughts ...').⁹⁹ Benjamin also read the 'The Life Apart' as an expression of 'sentimental "excess"', demonstrated most convincingly by an entry dated 26 May 1908, that Wharton resisted elsewhere:¹⁰⁰

Herblay ... Montfort l'Amaury ... Provins ... Beauvais ... Montmorency ..
Senlis ... Meudon ... What dear, sweet, crowding memories! What wealth for a
heart that was empty this time last year. How the wych-hazel has kept its
promise, since it flowered in our hands last October!—Bring me, magic flower,
one more day such as those—but dearer, nearer, by all these death-pangs of
separation with which my heart is torn!¹⁰¹

In October 1907, during Fullerton's first visit to The Mount, Wharton took her houseguests on one of her beloved motor flights. At one point during this expedition, she and Fullerton sat down to smoke on a bank in the woods, near a blooming witch-hazel. When Fullerton sent her a thank-you note a few days later, he enclosed a spray of witch-hazel (*EW*, pp.307-8).

Yet, as Kenneth Price and Phyllis McBride noted, 'The Life Apart' is 'hardly a transparent window on Wharton's thought processes and actions'.¹⁰² Even in this most exposing account, Wharton guards her own secrets through the incorporation of gaps or blanks in the 'narrative', such as (unsurprisingly) those surrounding the actual consummation of the affair, but also as if inviting potential readers to fill them.¹⁰³ Benstock cast Wharton's poem, 'Terminus', written after a night spent with Fullerton at the Charing Cross hotel in London, as 'a poetic rendering of their initial seduction' (*NG*, p.225). If accurate, this would date the physical consummation of the affair to 4 June 1909 (*EWB*, p.258). Price and McBride, however, questioned Benstock's reconstruction of events. Based on their reading of 'The Life Apart', they found it plausible that the affair was consummated during the spring of 1908. They cited, for example, the entry dated 21 May 1908 that includes the following:

I have drunk of the wine of life at last, I have known the thing best worth
knowing, I have been warmed through and through, never to grow quite cold
again till the end.... [...] How often I used to say to myself: "No one can love
life as I do, love the beauty & the splendor & the ardour, & find the words for
them as I can, without having a share in them some day"—I mean the dear
intimate share that one guessed at, always, beyond & behind their universal
thrill!—And the day came—the day has *been*—& I have poured into it all my
stored-up joy of living [...].¹⁰⁴

I agree with their interpretation of such comments in the diary suggesting that consummation came earlier and do not view 'Terminus' as disclosing details concerning the start of Wharton and Fullerton's physical relationship. The poem does, however, reveal

⁹⁹ Price and McBride, pp.673, 677, 680.

¹⁰⁰ Benjamin, p.24.

¹⁰¹ Price and McBride, p.682.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p.665.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp.665-6; Benjamin, p.24.

¹⁰⁴ See Price and McBride, p.684, note 11.

intimate aspects of a secret affair that included unexpectedly banal, entirely humanising, liaisons in 'the common-place room / of the inn' (lines 5-6) where many 'like us [...] have lain & felt, breast to breast in / the dark, / The fiery rain of possession descend on their limbs' (lines 52-4).¹⁰⁵

1.3. *Wharton's personal correspondence*

Wharton's selective preservation or destruction of written correspondence increases the sense, created by the restraint of her autobiographical writing, of a life edited for the benefit of others. Business correspondence was carefully filed away; the Beinecke's collection includes a minimum of four thousand such letters. R.W.B. Lewis and Nancy Lewis judged another four thousand letters, including personal correspondence, as potentially suitable for their edited collection.¹⁰⁶ This detail emphasises the selectivity of their volume, which comprises only some four hundred letters and thus in itself presents a curated image. The point was driven home in an interview shortly after the volume's publication when Lewis and Lewis recalled rejecting certain letters containing 'prejudices', and omitting one expressing 'some vilely anti-semitic comments' at the recommendation of their publisher for fear that it would 'over-shadow all the others in the media'.¹⁰⁷ Wharton destroyed a proportion of the personal correspondence that she received during her lifetime, including that from Teddy. After his death, she burnt her letters to her friend, the diplomat and lawyer Walter Berry, as well as his to her, while James himself destroyed the letters that she wrote to him (*EWB*, pp.xi, 531).¹⁰⁸ Indeed, the preservation of Wharton's letters was subject to the varying levels of care and interest of her correspondents. James was as concerned as Wharton over paper trails into his private world and would even instruct correspondents to 'burn this!', hence his willingness to do the same on her behalf.¹⁰⁹ But Wharton's archives include large numbers of letters to friends, including Lapsley, the art historian Bernard Berenson (1865-1959) and his wife Mary, as well as a collection of letters to Bahlmann, while those written to Lubbock are, intriguingly, missing. Perhaps most conspicuous among her preserved correspondence are the three hundred letters from Wharton to Fullerton dating between 1907 and 1915 and held at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas. It bought the collection through a Dutch firm of booksellers acting on behalf of a Parisian antiquarian dealer in 1980, but the life history of the letters prior to that

¹⁰⁵ Edith Wharton, 'Terminus', in *Edith Wharton: Selected Poems*, ed. by Louis Auchincloss (New York: Library of America, 2005), pp.160-3.

¹⁰⁶ R.W.B. Lewis and Nancy Lewis, 'Introduction', in *The Letters of Edith Wharton*, ed. by R.W.B. Lewis and Nancy Lewis (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988), pp.3-23 (p.3).

¹⁰⁷ Alfred Bendixen, 'Lewis Discuss the Letters: R.W.B. Lewis and Nancy Lewis on *The Letters of Edith Wharton*', *Edith Wharton Newsletter*, 6 (1989), 1-2 (p.1).

¹⁰⁸ Colm Tóibín, 'A Bundle of Letters', in *All a Novelist Needs: Colm Tóibín on Henry James*, ed. by S.M. Griffin (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), pp.89-106.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p.89.

point is vague.¹¹⁰ Whenever plagued by doubts about the relationship, Wharton would request, unsuccessfully, that Fullerton return her letters, but also begged in at least one happy moment the ‘instant cremation’ of what she must have viewed as a particularly revealing missive (*LEW*, pp.139, 158, 170, 193). Her unease turned out to be justified; prior to his death Fullerton sold twenty-two letters postdating their affair, along with a larger number of James’ letters, to Houghton Library at Harvard University.¹¹¹ Fullerton’s sale realised one of Wharton’s as well as James’ worst fears, reflected in their fictional work. Wharton’s *The Touchstone* (1900) and James’ ‘The Aspern Papers’ (1888) deal explicitly with the theme of authors’ letters being exploited posthumously.¹¹² The irony of a man peddling the letters of two close friends renowned for their prudence, and who once rescued him from an extortion demand involving his own illicit love letters, is marked (*EW*, pp.332-3).

Examining the affair documented by the correspondence between Wharton and Fullerton, particularly what others in their social circle knew about it, and when, establishes Wharton’s direct experience of how secrets are kept, and provides background to this aspect of their portrayal in her writing. That the facts surrounding the Wharton-Fullerton liaison remained largely unknown until 1968 demonstrates not only Wharton’s own successful secrecy, but also the extent to which those around her shielded her from widespread scrutiny and judgment. It corroborates the idea that reputation and biography, like autobiography, are constructed phenomena and thus subject to the values, biases and loyalties of all those involved in their creation. Lewis mentioned the ‘dim awareness’ of a developing relationship among some of her American friends in Paris, and assumed, like Griffin Wolff, that Wharton’s household, notably Gross, ‘protected [her] by such massive displays of tact [...] as can only be guessed at’ (*EWB*, pp.212, 222; *FW*, p.148). Lee noted also that their ‘secret game was opened up to the complicit understanding’ of Léon Bélugou (1865-1934), a French scholar and close friend of Fullerton (*EW*, p.330). In her eccentric biography of Fullerton, Marion Mainwaring wondered how much James knew about the affair.¹¹³ Leon Edel gave no indication that James knew and himself only speculated vaguely that Wharton might have been ‘consoling herself with Fullerton’.¹¹⁴ Griffin Wolff, on the other hand, was confident that James was Wharton’s only friend in the know, while Lyall Powers asserted that she had told James about the affair with Fullerton by the autumn of 1908 (*FW*, p.148).¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ Lewis and Lewis, pp.4-5, 11.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.11.

¹¹² Henry James, ‘The Aspern Papers’, in *The Aspern Papers and Other Stories*, ed. by Adrian Poole (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp.3-88; Edith Wharton, *The Touchstone* (London: Hesperus Press, 2003).

¹¹³ Marion Mainwaring, *Mysteries of Paris: The Quest for Morton Fullerton* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2001), pp.205-7.

¹¹⁴ Leon Edel, *Henry James: The Master 1901-1916* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1972), pp.421, 424.

¹¹⁵ Lyall H. Powers, ed., *Henry James and Edith Wharton: Letters: 1900-1915* (New York: Scribner’s, 1990), pp.16, 84, 102.

Lee too seems convinced that James knew (*EW*, p.333). The friendship between them saw James, Wharton and Fullerton dine, take excursions, talk and plot together in France, England and America at various points in the relationship (for example *EWB*, pp.216-20, 258, 262-3).¹¹⁶ It is most likely that the secret, while not widely known, was an open one shared among members of Wharton and Fullerton's immediate circle, including James.

Fullerton himself appears to have been sanguine in later years about sharing their secret with the world. After his departure from the Charing Cross hotel on the morning of 5 June 1909, Fullerton sent Wharton roses; she composed 'Terminus'. Wharton lent Fullerton her handwritten copy of the poem which, considering her habitual reticence, signified trust. She also asked him to 'send back the poem soon', which he did, but only after copying it and identifying its origin (*EWB*, pp.258-60). After the publication of Lubbock's biography, Elisina Tyler considered writing a biography of her own of Wharton's life and, in that context, Fullerton urged her to give a more accurate account of Wharton's nature. Tyler and Fullerton had been in contact a year earlier concerning 'The Life Apart', which was in her possession, and his copy of 'Terminus' (*EW*, p.750). A year later he would urge her to "seize the event, however delicate the problem, to dispel the myth of your heroine's frigidity" (*EWB*, p.222). The anticipation in these words reveals Fullerton's eagerness finally to share a secret that neither he nor Wharton had wanted known at the time. When she had completed two-thirds of *The Reef*, around May 1912, Wharton asked Fullerton to read the manuscript; 'she could "see the end", but could not "go on alone" (*NG*, p.266). Letters to Fullerton during the summer of that year repeatedly mention and seek his comments on the text (*LEW*, pp.271-2, 275). Her dependence on his feedback is striking, but so too is Fullerton's concern over its autobiographical elements. A communication from Wharton to Fullerton reveals that he worried about Berry having read the manuscript. She set his mind at ease; Berry had not read any of it and their own secret would not be revealed (*NG*, pp.267-8).

As time passed the danger posed by their secret diminished. Gloria Erlich's analysis of Fullerton's relationship with women starts with his mother, Julia Fullerton, who shared and nurtured his interest in literature and writing. Erlich found that in this 'mother-son relationship originated a lifelong affective pattern – pursuit and acceptance of female adoration while returning only enough to maintain the flow of love in his direction'.¹¹⁷ This pattern is obvious in Fullerton's relationship with the slightly older Wharton, who wished to promote his writing career and who rescued him from a blackmail attempt involving papers

¹¹⁶ Also see Edel, p.454.

¹¹⁷ Erlich, pp.98-9.

implicating Lady Margaret Brooke (1849-1936), the Ranee of Sarawak. Fullerton's affair with Brooke during the 1890s was one of a series of liaisons during his lifetime with partners of both sexes. Brooke, Fullerton's senior by fifteen years, was a writer in her own right and a member of Henry James' literary circle. Fullerton also had a relationship with the novelist Blanche Roosevelt (1853-1898) in the decade before the turn of the century. Then, while involved with Wharton, he was temporarily engaged to his cousin and adoptive sister, Katharine Fullerton (1879-1944). Katharine Fullerton went on to have success as a fictional and critical writer and taught English at Bryn Mawr College (*EW*, pp.323, 325).¹¹⁸ A 'collector' of literary women, 'Terminus' was a trophy for Fullerton, a symbol of his conquest of the late Edith Wharton. It is perhaps fortunate that Tyler's biography – presumably reflecting Fullerton's perspective – never materialised, but it also would be decades before Wharton's reputation for superior remoteness was reassessed.

1.4. R.W.B. Lewis and Cynthia Griffin Wolff's biographies

After the opening of Wharton's papers, two biographical works in particular marked a turning point in Wharton studies. They were Lewis' *Edith Wharton* (1975) and Griffin Wolff's *A Feast of Words: The Triumph of Edith Wharton* (1977). Published in short succession, originality of content and slant characterises Lewis and Griffin Wolff's versions of Edith Wharton's life. They were helped in this task by their unprecedented access to the narratives that Wharton had created for private rather than public consumption, and those created by others who knew the novelist best.

Lewis disclosed to the world a previously unknown, multifaceted Wharton. She appeared to invite him to do so in a selection of documents marked 'For My Biographer' that included letters concerning Teddy's illness and their divorce in 1913. The record that Wharton left had been crafted; no historical record can ever be entire or unbiased. Goodman rightly stated that Wharton 'constructed an archive' by selecting and highlighting certain documents for attention.¹¹⁹ In addition to letters pertaining to Teddy and the Whartons' divorce, the preface to Lewis' biography mentions his access to her diaries, unpublished poems and incomplete stories that, in his own words, 'shook to pieces most of the preconceptions' that he himself had held (*EWB*, p.xi). His portrayal of Wharton is likely to have done the same for his readers. Appended to his volume is a discussion concerning Wharton's paternity that outlines the basis of a rumour that she was the illegitimate daughter of her brothers' English tutor, but finds it impossible to verify, as well as the plot summary and fragment of the erotic and incestuous 'Beatrice Palmato'. The fragment along with Lewis' revelations

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p.100.

¹¹⁹ Goodman, 'Portraits', p.61.

concerning Fullerton – he also reproduced ‘Terminus’ – overhauled critical understanding of Wharton. Goodman commented that her books ‘suddenly appeared to have been written by a more sympathetic person’ and ‘redolent with frustrated passion’.¹²⁰

Lewis’ access to Wharton’s correspondence richly furnished his chapters on the Fullerton affair and Teddy’s physical, psychological and moral decline. In December 1909 Teddy confessed to Wharton a series of connected transgressions, including the embezzlement of some fifty thousand dollars from her trust funds, a property bought in Boston, and the installment there of a mistress and, possibly, chorus girls (*EWB*, pp.275, 277). Those around the couple had been aware of Teddy’s ill health, but Lewis noted that Wharton now wrote James ‘a guarded account’, dealing notably with Teddy’s financial misbehaviour; she shared similar details with others, including Lizzie Cameron (*EWB*, pp.276, 279). Later there existed a ‘circle whose members passed much of their time telling one another the most recent news about the movements, the accomplishments, and the “situation” of Edith Wharton’, which included the drawn-out breakdown of the Wharton marriage between 1909 and 1913 (*EWB*, p.328). Teddy’s repeated infidelities since 1908 provided sufficient grounds for divorce, yet Lewis established Wharton’s distress, as well as her reliance on her friends’ support as the couple parted ways (*EWB*, pp.334-6). Other painful and previously unacknowledged incidents in Wharton’s life that lent texture to Lewis’ account include an humiliating broken engagement to Harry Stevens (*EWB*, pp.44-5), the estrangement from her brother Harry (*EWB*, pp.331-2), her quarrel with Lubbock (*EWB*, p.515), and James’ forceful rejection of her efforts to raise a sum of some five thousand dollars among their American friends for the purchase of his seventieth birthday gift (*EWB*, pp.339-41). Lewis’ description of Wharton’s subsequent, and this time entirely secret, financial aid to James, engineered with the help of Charles Scribner, contributed further to his nuanced portrayal of Edith Wharton (*EWB*, pp.342-3).

Building on Lewis’ work, Griffin Wolff disclosed to the world Wharton in all her psychological complexity. She wrote in the prologue to her biography: ‘Edith Wharton was never a deliberate prevaricator; yet we are all fabricators when it comes to reconstructing our own histories’ (*FW*, p.5). Griffin Wolff’s reference to fabrication recalls Wharton’s childhood description of her imaginative process as ‘making up’, which I return to later. *A Feast of Words* attempted a portrayal of the novelist that focuses on ‘the reality of her inner world’, as much as on her fictions (*FW*, p.5). While the aim and ability of any biography to reflect accurately the inner world of its subject demands healthy skepticism – Griffin Wolff

¹²⁰ Ibid., p.65.

herself commented that she depended on Wharton's 'memories and emotions as she has reported them' – her approach is relevant to a consideration of Wharton's secrets (*FW*, p.5). She interpreted Wharton's involvement with Harry Stevens primarily in terms of his formidable mother who appears to have been 'even more dreadful than Mother', and the young woman's emotional and sexual repression. Stevens represented a continuation of what Wharton had known all her life and, like Teddy, seemed a 'safe' option (*FW*, p.49). This reading exaggerates the choice available to women like Wharton. Within a closed society such as Old New York, prospective partners were carefully vetted and limited.¹²¹ As a result, incompatible marriages were not uncommon.

Griffin Wolff also attached much importance to the ways in which Wharton's upbringing contributed to her inability to express herself emotionally and sexually in her marriage to Teddy, and to the long-term effects of that imposed silence. She connected Wharton's asthma attacks in the early years of marriage with occasions when she and Teddy shared a bedroom; in her opinion, Wharton 'talked with her body, and she found that she could not breathe' (*FW*, p.51). In this scenario Teddy's mere presence literally suffocates Wharton; she later described Wharton's illness, which lasted for the first twelve years of her marriage, as involving constant sensations of nausea and fatigue (*FW*, p.52). Wharton identified her malady as a form of 'neurasthenia', a vaguely defined and no longer widely recognised illness linked to a wide range of mental and physical symptoms (*FW*, p.52).¹²² Moving into The Mount and her own bedroom in 1902, and returning to writing after 'her long silence', would effectively return her to good health, but did not cure her marriage problems (*FW*, pp.52, 54). Indeed, as Wharton flourished, Teddy declined. Griffin Wolff interpreted the Fullerton affair as Wharton's readiness to enter, finally, into a 'delayed adolescence' and 'to live for the moment', while Teddy's mental and physical health deteriorated relentlessly (*FW*, pp.147-8, 151). As Wharton, free from the repression of her youth, experienced for the first time self-expression and -fulfillment in her secret relationship with Fullerton, she was required to manage the contrastingly public breakdown of her husband and marriage.

1.5. *Hermione Lee's biography*

Wharton's most recent biography, Lee's *Edith Wharton* (2007), demonstrated superbly the extent to which her secrets have become embedded in contemporary scholarship, and is a significant resource in this thesis. No longer is it necessary to reproduce 'Terminus' or 'Beatrice Palmato', first brought into the public domain by Lewis and Griffin Wolff, and

¹²¹ See Pamela Knights, 'The Marriage Market', in *Edith Wharton in Context*, ed. by Laura Rattray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp.223-33 (p.228).

¹²² David G. Schuster, 'Neurasthenia and Modernizing America', *JAMA*, 290 (2003), 2327-8 (p.2327).

‘The Life Apart’ has been published in full. Since Lee’s volume, many more of Wharton’s personal and professional letters, including those to Anna Bahlmann and to Macmillan in London, have been made available as scholarly editions.¹²³ Current criticism accepts Wharton’s dynamism, engagement and complexity. As a consequence, Lee was able to consider the novelist’s biography more intensely than ever before. Inevitably, those aspects of her personal and artistic life that she herself withheld from others, or shared selectively, featured – strongly in the case of the Fullerton affair – but no longer demanded readers to adjust their perceptions of her entirely. Instead they were presented in richer detail, and subjected to deeper enquiry, often in relation to Wharton’s writing. Lee discussed not one but two rumours around Wharton’s paternity, that she was at one time thought to be the daughter of the Scottish, red-haired Lord Brougham and at another that of her brothers’ English tutor, before considering the role of ‘the illegitimate or misfit child, the disruptive newcomer’ in Wharton’s stories (*EW*, pp.32-3). She also evaluated with fresh eyes the work of others, like Benstock, who interpreted an undated letter to Fullerton as proof of her brother telling her around 1920 about her rumoured illegitimacy, and placed such snippets of information into a broader context, in this case the long-term effect of her quarrel with Harry Jones in 1913 (*EW*, pp.394-5, 646). Likewise the description of her 1913 clandestine financial aid to James was elaborated with details of his reaction and of Charles Scribner’s involvement and nervous request for confidentiality (*EW*, pp.255-6). After James’ acceptance of the money, Scribner wrote to Wharton: ‘I feel rather mean and caddish and must continue so to the end of my days. Please never give me away.’¹²⁴ The incident was contextualised in terms of the numerous other ways in which Wharton supported James, evoking a sense of her devotion to him. It also spoke of Wharton’s confidence in Charles Scribner, who shared his client’s desire for secrecy in this matter, and of his trust in her.

Wharton grew increasingly attentive to her future reputation during her final decade. After a lifetime of public self-censorship that represented ‘good form’ and ‘good taste’ and that was in keeping with the conventions of her youth, though perhaps increasingly out of step with those of the inter-war world, she ‘foresaw the stiffly conventional image of herself that would be perpetuated by Lubbock and others’, and created a diary between 1924 and 1937 with the intention to express the ‘gist’ of herself for the benefit of a future biographer (*EWB*, p.xii). It is impossible to know whether she ever expected her most private affairs, such as those captured in the ‘The Life Apart’, to be laid out for the scrutiny of strangers. If this was her objective, Wharton did not anticipate the scruples of her literary executor and the extent to which secrecy would continue to define her for decades after her death. It is access to the

¹²³ See Goldman-Price, *My Dear Governess*; Towheed, *The Correspondence*.

¹²⁴ Scribner to Wharton, 2 April 1913. Series II, Box 27, Folder 827.

preserved details of her private life that has done most to undermine the negative influence of Lubbock's biography and to recall the woman behind the cool contemporary public image, as memorably evoked by James:

She rode the whirlwind, she played with the storm, she laid waste whatever of the land the other raging elements spared.... Her powers of devastation are ineffable, her repudiation of repose absolutely tragic, and she was never more brilliant and able and interesting.¹²⁵

2. Wharton and silence

Wharton became renowned both for her ability to provide an insider's view of Old New York society, and her unique eyewitness accounts of places and events far removed from it. Her war writing exchanged the drawing room of polite society for the Western Front. It was, however, the immense personal effort that she put into her relief work between 1914 and 1918, discussed more fully in Chapter 3, that necessitated her withdrawal from the French capital to the quiet, revitalising landscape of Hyères. In the second part of this section I pause over the silences of Hyères and Sainte-Claire, the home that Wharton acquired there in 1919, before considering in the third part spiritual silences and how those might have complemented Wharton's fascination with built religious heritage throughout her life and the increasingly Catholic leanings of her final years. The section concludes with a discussion of Wharton's appreciation of silences between sympathetic companions, as well as of silences – sometimes chosen, sometimes imposed – that exclude others, but foster contented independence. The aim of this examination is to show the positive connotations of silence in Wharton's life, whether she encountered it as a restorative force or broke it as a repressive one, which supports a reading of certain silences in her writing as empowering.

2.1. *Seeking and breaking silences*

When Wendell Berry (b. 1934) advised would-be poets to '[m]ake a place to sit down. / Sit down. Be quiet. [...] Accept what comes from silence' (lines 1-2, 23) in his 'How to Be a Poet' (2001), he captured an essential aspect of the professional writer's work.¹²⁶ In this Wharton was no exception; having access to silence and solitude was integral to her creative process. It was, however, exceptional that someone as gregarious as Wharton should have chosen a career reliant on sustained private and quiet effort.

Wharton's childhood practice of 'making up' was an obvious preamble to what would become her profession. She explains in *A Backward Glance* this way of telling stories:

¹²⁵ Edel, pp.467-8.

¹²⁶ Wendell Berry, 'How to Be a Poet', *Poetry*, January (2001)

<<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/41087/how-to-be-a-poet>> [accessed 7 September 2017].

before she was able to read, she would use a book as a prop for imagining stories of her own. These stories would involve the ladies and gentlemen who came to dine at her family's home in Paris, and whom she observed out and about in the city. (Between 1866 and 1872 the Joneses lived in Europe, notably Italy and France.) She would page through Washington Irving's *The Alhambra* (1832), which was closely printed in heavy black type with narrow margins, and pace the floor as she spoke aloud her tales, 'passionately and precipitately' (ABG, pp.33-5; EW, p.7). She allowed no other children or adults to intrude on this process that was 'ritualistic in the performance'; what she 'really preferred was to be alone' (ABG, p.35). Elsewhere in her autobiography Wharton speaks of a 'secret retreat' inside herself that was 'haunted' by 'words and cadences [...] like song-birds in a magic wood' that she wanted to listen to when called (ABG, p.70). At the age of ten the ritual of 'making up' gave way to writing. This was when she started penning poems and stories, prolifically. Writing paper being scarce, she begged 'the right to all wrapping paper that came into the house' (ABG, pp.74-5).¹²⁷ Writing for Wharton, like 'making up', was private and solitary, but its customary silence distinguished it further. Jane Brox has described learning to read – and thus to write – as 'a descent into silence'.¹²⁸ Wharton would continue thus throughout her career. She would routinely spend her mornings writing in bed, allowing the pages to drop to the floor where they would be collected and typed by her secretary, before meeting her regular, small parties of houseguests at lunchtime (EW, pp.153, 544, 665).¹²⁹ In later years when reading work-in-progress to a wider circle of friends became a further part of Wharton's process, or she even received visitors in her bedroom as an account by Lapsley suggests, her practical approach to her work still involved a specific formula, much as 'making up' used to do (EW, pp.546, 665). It may be that over time her instinctive sociability vied more strongly with her need to create stories, that the two aspects of her life became less discrete, but like Wendell Berry, she appears to have understood that literary creativity also hinges on engaging with and preserving silence.

To express that creativity, Wharton was required to break a socially imposed silence. *A Backward Glance* makes much of her parents' ambivalence about professional writers. George and Lucretia Jones are portrayed as appreciating literature, but not as great readers. In Wharton's autobiography, their suspicion of those who worked for a living was compounded by the impression that writers were socially undesirable. She remarks drolly that her 'mother doubtless thought, it would be simpler if people one might be exposed to meeting would refrain from meddling with literature', and that in her 'provincial society

¹²⁷ Edith Wharton, 'Life and I', in *Novellas and Other Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1990), pp.1069-96 (p.1090).

¹²⁸ Jane Brox, *Silence: A Social History of One of the Least Understood Elements of Our Lives* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2019), pp.99-100.

¹²⁹ Richard Jones, *Edith Wharton in Provence* (Menlo Park, CA: Occasional Works, 2003), p.21.

authorship was still regarded as something between a black art and a form of manual labour' (ABG, pp.49, 68-9). Auchincloss, however, noted that sixteen-year-old Wharton's first poems were privately printed in a pamphlet entitled *Verses* (1878) and commented that her parents' trouble and expense to produce this collection 'goes far to rebut the statement so often made by her biographers that she grew up in an atmosphere of indifference to her creative talent'.¹³⁰ His reading is supported by Irene Goldman-Price, who argued convincingly for the active interest taken by Wharton's parents and brother Harry in her education and development as an artist.¹³¹ Griffin Wolff took a rather different view, describing Lucretia's involvement as an effort 'to domesticate her daughter's gifts' and an 'act of perverse "generosity" making every fault of youth available to the tolerant eyes of family and friends', but Wharton's reported 'mortification' over what she saw as an indiscretion could reasonably be reinterpreted as an adolescent reaction, especially in view of her subsequent triumph as a professional writer (FW, p.47). As an established novelist Wharton spoke directly to a large and diverse audience, thus breaking the preconceptions and social barriers that had surrounded her as a child and young woman. In order to become a novelist Wharton overcame, in Showalter's words, her background's 'decorum of self-constraint'.¹³² Still, her narrative strategy retains an undeniable element of censorship. As I will demonstrate in Chapter 3, Wharton's authorial voice is both preoccupied with, and admiring of, silences, often those related to self-sacrifice, but through her non-fiction she also arbitrates between silence and speech, breaking certain thematic silences to shine a light on the world as she perceives it.

2.2. *Hyères: a place of silence*

By the time that Wharton began to winter in the south of France, she embodied the successful novelist. Having come through the devastation and clamour of the Great War, she intentionally withdrew from a Paris that, for her, was becoming too noisy and busy as a result of the peace conference and a subsequent influx of Americans that continued into the 1920s.¹³³ On the Côte d'Azur the old town of Hyères clings to the hill of Castéou where ancient Greek and Roman settlements once stood and where presumably older, undeciphered cupule markings on rock panels challenge viewers' interpretative abilities (EW, pp.538, 544). In this landscape of silent ancients Wharton acquired a property in 1919 that was itself permeated by silence. Sainte-Claire du Château had been built on the site of a convent belonging to the Sisters of Saint Claire or *Institute des Pauvres Femmes*. Members of the

¹³⁰ Louis Auchincloss, 'Introduction', in *Edith Wharton: Selected Poems*, ed. by Louis Auchincloss (New York: Library of America, 2005), pp.xiii-xxii (p.xiii).

¹³¹ Irene Goldman-Price, 'Introduction', in *My Dear Governess: The Letters of Edith Wharton to Anna Bahlmann*, ed. by Irene Goldman-Price (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), pp.1-24 (pp.6-7).

¹³² Showalter, 'The Death', p.361.

¹³³ Alan Price, *The End of the Age of Innocence: Edith Wharton and the First World War* (London: Robert Hale, 1996), p.167.

order, founded in the thirteenth century by Saint Claire of Assisi, observe almost complete silence. Notably too, their orders were the first ones written by a woman.¹³⁴ A fort had once stood on the hilltop above the old town, but this was dismantled during the reign of Louis XIII (1619-1643). The subsequent convent, built in 1712, was largely destroyed at the time of the French Revolution in 1789. Then, in 1849, an amateur archaeologist, Olivier Voutier (1796-1877), restored the remaining ramparts of the historical building complex and built himself La Villa Sainte Claire. It stood empty from 1877 until Wharton's lease and subsequent purchase of the property. Her considerable proceeds from *The Age of Innocence*, a novel punctuated by knowing silences as well as secrets, funded Sainte-Claire's restoration.¹³⁵

Wharton, 'under the spell of the landscape', was as enchanted by the layered history of Sainte-Claire and its surroundings, as by it not being on the fashionable, bustling Riviera (*EW*, pp.534, 536). What she sought was a place of her own and the companionship of friends.¹³⁶ Due to its beauty, secluded setting and railway links, Hyères' mild climate attracted a wealth of winter tourists during the nineteenth century, along with those suffering from respiratory ailments. Its charm, however, had begun to fade by the turn of the century (*EW*, pp.538-9). It became, as Lee put it, 'the perfect writer's refuge' (*EW*, p.535). Wharton was not the first to see Hyères as such; others included her close friend Paul Bourget (1852-1935), Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894), Conrad and Kipling. For her the place must have held special significance; this was where, in 1915, she took a month's refuge from her vigorous humanitarian and diplomatic involvement during the war (*EW*, pp.534, 539). About a return visit to Hyères in 1916, she wrote to Elizabeth 'Lizzie' Sherman Cameron, estranged wife of Pennsylvania politician James Donald Cameron upon whom she relied heavily in her war relief activities: 'Here I am, in peace & warmth & silence'.¹³⁷ Considering the socio-political context, this remark may be taken quite literally. In 1919 she wrote to Bernard Berenson of Hyères 'healing silence, & warm sun & long walks' that helped remove 'the poison out of my bones' (*LEW*, p.421). And a year later she declared in yet another letter to Berenson that 'the heavenly beauty & the heavenly quiet enfold' her, that Hyères 'really is the Cielo della Quieta to which the soul aspires after its stormy voyage' (*LEW*, p.434).

¹³⁴ Jean François Godet-Calogeras, 'Francis and Clare and the Emergence of the Second Order', in *The Cambridge Companion to Francis of Assisi*, ed. by Michael J.P. Robson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp.115-26 (pp.123-4).

¹³⁵ Jones, pp.14, 22.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.10.

¹³⁷ Price, pp.67, 86.

During and after the war years Hyères revived Wharton. Her fiction draws attention to the heavenliness of Sainte-Claire, the only place where she ‘owns’ herself (*EW*, p.543). Mark Inwood, hero of her incomplete historical novel ‘The Happy Isles’, begun and abandoned in the 1920s, arrives at the eighteenth-century convent to the idyllic tolling of its midday bells and kitchen garden fragrances (*EW*, pp.559-60):

Presently he saw before him a high fortress-like church. The terrace before it overhung the lower town; and beyond the crowded houses, and between them, Mark perceived that every yard of space was glossy and umbrageous with orange trees. Farther down, the polished foliage and bright fruit, crammed into every gap of the masonry, overflowed to the plain below in a vast evergreen lake bordered by the silver of the olive orchards and tawny autumnal vines; and from all the chimneys at his feet puffs of smoke announced the preparing of the midday meal, and the homely smell of olive-oil and garlic mixed its welcome with the scent of the orange-blossoms.¹³⁸

2.3. *Spiritual silences*

It seems likely that the spiritual connotations of the Hyères landscape complemented Wharton’s own pursuit and enjoyment of silence. In this context, her embrace of Catholicism during the final decades of her life and especially the 1930s is relevant. Wharton’s Catholicism was in part a rejection of her Protestant upbringing. As a little girl, she feared an ‘arbitrary, absolute’ God as much as she did her mother (*EWB*, pp.25-6).¹³⁹ Catholicism’s attraction was also aesthetic. In 1937 she wrote to Elisina Tyler that it ‘is not difficult to believe, and easiest to believe when inside a Church with its atmosphere, its glamour, its associations’ (*MMS*, p.37). Wharton was representative of an artistic and intellectual community that, as Carol Singley remarked, had tremendous admiration for European medieval expression of religion, art and culture at the turn of the nineteenth century. She noted specifically the novelist’s ‘endless motor flights to cathedrals, monasteries, and convents’, spaces devoted to silence and contemplation, as part of a search for transcendence (*MMS*, pp.20, 22). But over time this religious tourist would turn into a participant (*EWB*, pp.509-11; *MMS*, p.185). While she never converted, contrary to the expectations of many around her, she did seem increasingly sure of ‘the importance of the contemplative life over the material one’, and attracted by the uncertainty, even mystery, of religion (*EW*, p.714; *MMS*, p.37).

For Singley both Protestantism and Catholicism ‘reinforced the social inferiority of women’, and Wharton’s Catholicism ‘represented, at best, an uneasy alliance between mutually exclusive spiritual and feminist longings’ (*MMS*, p.37). The history of monasticism places

¹³⁸ ‘The Happy Isles’ corrected typescript. Series I, Box 17, Folder 497.

¹³⁹ Carol J. Singley, *Edith Wharton: Matters of Mind and Spirit* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.101.

the lesser status of women under the spotlight; while women are known to have chosen full commitment to religious life as far back as the fourth century, the decision to enter a convent was, until modern times, more often made on their behalf by men, and for practical, financial reasons rather than religious ones.¹⁴⁰ At the same time, ‘Catholicism alone taught women’s spiritual and moral superiority through its veneration of the Virgin’ (*MMS*, p.37). Wharton’s poem, ‘The Bread of Angels’, published originally in *Harper’s Monthly* (1902), tells of two ‘hooded nuns’ (line 25) who, night after night, during the ‘after-birth of midnight, when life’s face / [t]urns to the wall’ (lines 2-3) leave the ‘hushed convent where their kin / [l]ay hived in sweetness of their prayer-built cells’ (lines 34-5) to enter ‘[w]here greed and surfeit nodded face to face / [o]’er the picked bones of pleasure’ (lines 46-7).¹⁴¹ They visit one after the other ‘such a threshold’ (line 62). The speaker, who imagines their actions as earth quaking, causing the city to shake with ‘inarticulate clamor of gagged lips / [a]s in Jerusalem when the veil was rent’ (lines 52-4), follows the nuns back to the convent walls where the customary silence (line 77) has been replaced by the footfall of a ‘suppliant line / [o]f pallid figures, ghosts of happier folk, / [m]oving in some grey underworld of want’ (lines 81-3). And there ‘those two / [s]trange pilgrims of the sanctuaries of sin’ (lines 93-4) reveal two baskets, hidden under their clothes, ‘brimming with rich store’ (line 96), ‘[c]rumbs of Belshazzar’s table’ (line 98), ‘manna brought / [o]ut of the antique wilderness of sin’ (lines 103-4). This is a tale of audacious action, performed in near silence. The nuns’ only words are distressed murmurs of “‘too late!’” [...]. “‘Too late!’” (line 66), when ‘the last door had shot its tardy bolt’ (line 65) and they return home to distribute their spoils.

‘The Bread of Angels’ portrays the Catholic Church as possessing an unspoken, charitable role, as well as a degree of female autonomy and morality within the church that complements Singley’s view. The Church itself, however, has not always looked favourably upon monastic women breaking enclosure – ‘meant to accentuate silence and increase the opportunity to listen for the Word of God’ – and having close relationships with their surrounding communities.¹⁴² Its emphasis on enclosure reaches back to the Desert Fathers – fourth-century Christian ascetics who pursued seclusion in the Syrian and Egyptian deserts to attain purity.¹⁴³ Communities of followers established themselves around these spiritual leaders and pastoral relationships developed between them that impacted efforts at living separately and quietly.¹⁴⁴ During the early Middle Ages, the extent to which monastic women were enclosed varied, but more rigorous restrictions set them apart from monastic

¹⁴⁰ Brox, pp.196-7.

¹⁴¹ Edith Wharton, ‘The Bread of Angels’, in *Edith Wharton: Selected Poems*, ed. by Louis Auchincloss (New York: Library of America, 2005), pp.121-5.

¹⁴² Brox, p.200.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.54.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.54-5.

men. A critical point was reached in 1298 with Pope Boniface VIII's *Periculoso*. This papal decree represented the first universal law that made enclosure compulsory for all nuns, ostensibly to protect their souls and bodies against dangers posed by the secular world.¹⁴⁵ It was not uniformly implemented, but isolating convents from surrounding communities directly affected the intercessory role of nuns between God and his children, as well as their social presence and connections with the city, which included caring for the destitute, praying with communities, copying manuscripts and making tapestries and embroidery to sell, and providing lodging to older, unmarried women as well as to younger ones seeking an education.¹⁴⁶ Wharton's poem draws attention to the quiet yet determined participation of religious women in the secular world, in the face of restrictions historically imposed upon them. Like the young girl in nun's dress in Wharton's 'The Happy Isles' – who lets out a 'burst of youthful laughter' as she drops 'a knot of orange blossoms' on the ground in front of Mark Inwood passing by the convent walls in Hyères before withdrawing from her high window – they break their silent isolation to engage with the urban dwellers around them.¹⁴⁷

2.4. Shared and private silences

Wharton's friendship with the writer and art historian, Violet Paget or Vernon Lee, a British expatriate living in Italy, began in 1894. It was facilitated by the two women's shared interests in the pursuit of literary careers, European cultural heritage and travel, and Hellenism, or the study of Greek culture and its influence on other cultures (*EW*, p.98; *MMS*, p.33). They also had in common an appreciation for communal silences. Lee boldly declared the value of silence that characterises true companionship in an essay entitled 'In Praise of Silence' (1904):

Words are not necessarily companionable, far from it; but moods truly meet, to part in violent dissonance; or to move parallel in happy harmonic intervals; or, more poignant and more satisfying still, to pass gradually along some great succession of alien chords – common contemplation, say, of a world grievous or pleasant to both – on towards the peace, the consummation, of a great major close.¹⁴⁸

Indeed, Lee is fondest of 'the companion met once, or at most twice, in a lifetime [...] whose remarks, like certain music, feel restful, spacious, cool, airy – like silence'.¹⁴⁹ That Wharton shares her attitude towards companionable silence is shown by one of a series of haiku-like poems published in the *Yale Review* in 1920:¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.200.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.201; Silvia Evangelisti, "'We Do Not Have It, and We Do Not Want It': Women, Power, and Convent Reform in Florence", *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 34 (2003), 677-700 (pp.680, 689).

¹⁴⁷ 'The Happy Isles' corrected typescript. Series I, Box 17, Folder 497.

¹⁴⁸ Vernon Lee, 'In Praise of Silence' in *Hortus Vitae: Essays on the Gardening of Life* (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1904), pp.127-36 (p.129).

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.131-2.

¹⁵⁰ Edith Wharton, 'Lyrical Epigrams', *Yale Review*, 9 (1920), 348.

The silence of midnight,
A dying fire,
And the best unsaid....

Entitled 'Friendship', the poem is a meditation on the pleasure of silence, of quiet understanding in the hush of the night and the needlessness of words between friends. By Hermione Lee's account Wharton and Lee's friendship cooled with time (*EW*, p.97). But Vernon Lee clearly visited Sainte-Claire during the early 1920s, writing movingly to Wharton in 1926 of her 'wonderfully clear [mental] pictures of Hyères': 'The beautiful room with its lovely beckoning view is almost as detailed as the bedroom from which I am now writing. And the drives you took me [...]. Thank you for all that, dear Edith.'¹⁵¹ The affection in her words is clear. Perhaps, considering their shared views on friendship and silence, neither woman sought a relationship that would continue with unabating intensity and instead appreciated the quiet sense of understanding that existed between them.

Some silences are not to be shared, but exclusive to the individual. Despite her sociable nature, Wharton recognised the psychological benefits of serene self-containment. She wrote to Mary Berenson in 1918, when the latter was suicidal with depression:

I believe I know the only cure, which is to make one's center of life inside of one's self, not selfishly or excludingly, but with a kind of unassailable serenity — to decorate one's inner house so richly that one is content there, glad to welcome anyone who wants to come & stay, but happy all the same when one is inevitably alone (*EW*, p.408).

Such solitude, inescapably accompanied by silence, means that one's happiness is independent of the presence of others, that it is in fact anchored in metaphorical quiet, private spaces. Wharton also celebrates actual, quiet spaces. In *The Decoration of Houses* (1897) she discusses the historical distinction drawn between private and public domestic spaces: 'Privacy would seem to be one of the first requisites of civilized life', and laments, for example, the loss of the vestibule in 'modern English and American practice' that formerly separated the public hall and private staircase.¹⁵² Even 'private' spaces in late nineteenth-century homes of privilege were shared with staff ensuring their smooth running, which would explain their occupants' thirst for real quiet and solitude. Wharton's experiences of the war may have further increased her appreciation of having a private, quiet space, but its roots can also be traced back to her childhood desire for secrecy, whether she was 'making up', having 'adventures with books', or connecting with the natural world.

The image of an exclusive, inner house, such as the one described to Berenson, also features in Wharton's short story, 'The Fulness of Life' where, recalling Wharton's interest in the

¹⁵¹ Lee to Wharton, 6 February 1926. Series II, Box 30, Folder 909.

¹⁵² Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman Jr., *The Decoration of Houses* (New York: Scribner, 1897), pp.22, 111-2.

design and decoration of houses, the heroine compares a woman's nature to 'a great house full of rooms':

there is the hall, through which everyone passes in going in and out; the drawing-room, where one receives formal visits; the sitting-room, where the members of the family come and go as they list; but beyond that, far beyond, are other rooms, the handles of whose doors perhaps are never turned; no one knows the way to them, no one knows whither they lead; and in the innermost room, the holy of holies, the soul sits alone and waits for a footstep that never comes.¹⁵³

In her advice to Berenson, Wharton contemplates in general terms a richly decorated inner house where visitors may be welcome, but are not expected. She considers the fortifying benefits of being alone. Here she distinguishes regretfully between the different spaces inside such a house that are progressively exclusive, silent and lonely. Taken together, Wharton champions the ability to draw strength from and relish solitude and silence, rather than surrendering to it.

Wharton's most prominent encounters with silence occurred at three pivotal points in her life. These are her metamorphosis – rooted in her childhood flights of imagination – into a professional writer, her efforts to withdraw from the bustle of Paris and to reclaim a normal life after 1918, and her intensifying spiritualism and immersion in Catholicism during the 1920s and 1930s. Understanding the importance of silence to Wharton at these threshold moments helps to explain her engagement with this theme in her writing, as studied in this thesis.

III. CRITICAL FRAMEWORK

1. Secrecy

Recognising Wharton's early experience as a playwright is necessary for fully appreciating her understanding of secrets, secrecy and secret sharing. The lack of scholarship on Wharton's writing for the stage is curious. In her most recent work on Wharton, Laura Rattray has established Wharton's abiding interest in writing for the theatre and her position as a 'seasoned playwright' by the time of *The House of Mirth*'s dramatic adaptation in 1906.¹⁵⁴ Wharton participated in the world of Edwardian drama as a writer as well as a translator.¹⁵⁵ Within this tradition, the didactic society play, which evolved from the French *pièce à thèse*, a *pièce bien fait* or a 'well-made play with a moral lesson', expressed the dependent and ornamental nature of women, and their roles in society.¹⁵⁶ In addition, the

¹⁵³ Edith Wharton, 'The Fulness of Life', in *Wharton: Collected Stories 1891-1910*, ed. by Maureen Howard (New York: Library of America, 2001), pp.12-22 (p.14).

¹⁵⁴ Laura Rattray, *Edith Wharton and Genre: Beyond Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), p.57.

¹⁵⁵ Cynthia Griffin Wolff, 'Lily Bart and the Drama of Femininity', *American Literary History*, 6 (1994), 71-87 (pp.71-3).

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.71, 74.

plot of a well-made play is normally based on a secret that is known to the audience, but not to all the characters in the play. Growing suspense, misunderstandings and the changing fortunes of the hero are key features of such plays. Finally, the truth is revealed, and ‘a climactic and cathartic moral judgment’ conveyed, during the *scène à faire* or obligatory scene that becomes a *coup de théâtre*, introducing a surprising twist.¹⁵⁷

1.1. Wharton's engagement with modernism

Understanding Wharton's idiosyncratic engagement with modernism complements the study of secrecy in her writing. As views on Wharton's ‘feminism’ have fluctuated, so views on her modernism have varied. She did not hesitate to express her reservations about literary modernism, but selectively employed modernist aesthetics, commented on modernist concerns, and portrayed the realities of modern life in her writing according to Jennifer Haytock. She drew attention to Wharton's use of epiphany to generate character growth; to her thematic treatment of expatriation and alienation, often in response to technological advancements, consumerism and commercialisation, and the ‘exotic’ or primitive; and finally to her frank portrayal of women's experiences in the contemporary world.¹⁵⁸ Wharton may have been critical of the modernist pre-occupation with self-expression and, by extension, developments such as psychoanalysis and stream of consciousness, but her writing demonstrates a concern with or recognition of the inner life of characters; she herself observed that modern fiction began when the novel's action ‘was transferred from the street to the soul’ (*EW*, pp.604-5).¹⁵⁹ Wharton uses narrative structure to open and close metaphorical doors to her characters' inner selves, variably revealing or obscuring consciousness to her readers, all the while exploring the limits of knowability of character. For Max Saunders literary impressionism, often equated with the ‘advent of modernism’, interrogates ‘the knowability of character’ and ‘the intelligibility of a character's destiny’ to complement and challenge realism's search for an ‘accurate, candid account of life’.¹⁶⁰ Not content merely to shift the realist fascination with the particulars of the tangible exterior world to one concerned with the intangible interior world characteristic of the stream-of-consciousness novel, impressionism works to undermine the sense of certainty that realism seeks to establish.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.71-2.

¹⁵⁸ Jennifer Haytock, ‘Modernism’, in *Edith Wharton in Context*, ed. by Laura Rattray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp.364-73 (pp.364-70).

¹⁵⁹ Edith Wharton, *The Writing of Fiction* (London: Scribner's Sons, 1925), p.3.

¹⁶⁰ Jesse Matz, *Literary Impressionism and Modernist Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.14; Max Saunders, ‘Introduction’, in Ford Madox Ford, *The Good Soldier*, ed. by Max Saunders (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp.vii-xliii (p.xiv).

¹⁶¹ Saunders, pp.xi, xiv.

Such uncertainty is particular to the work of Wharton's near contemporary, Ford Madox Ford (1873-1939), who grapples with the limitations and subjectivity of human attentiveness and memory:

The point is that any piece of Impressionism, whether it be prose, or verse, or painting, or sculpture, is the record of the impression of a moment; it is not a sort of rounded, annotated record of a set of circumstances – it is the record of the recollection in your mind.¹⁶²

It is also a feature of the writings of Ford's fellow impressionists, James and Conrad.

According to Paul Armstrong all three novelists explore the construction of reality through interpretation, rather than attempt to construct 'lifelike worlds'.¹⁶³ In their view reality is not monolithic, but rather (or as it happens also, in James' case), a 'collection of constructs'.¹⁶⁴ James, Conrad and Ford withstand representing the whole, instead working out which facts to introduce and which to leave unsaid. They employ gaps and multiple perspectives to alert readers to the aspects that are presented, and to their own interpretative role in the hermeneutic process.¹⁶⁵ James' objective is to create a gap between the author and text, which ensures a gap between text and reader, which ensures novels which '*must* be read twice', and '*read* in a more exalted sense', rather than 'devoured'.¹⁶⁶ In relation to Conrad's work, Ian Watt called this technique 'delayed decoding'; Robert Hampson explained the method as the text emphasising gaps or delays between immediate sensory impression and full understanding on the part of his characters, but in effect Conrad's readers are engaged in exactly the same process of slow-dawning understanding that requires re-reading.¹⁶⁷ Readers are required by all three novelists to reflect on the process of understanding, but instead of providing them with a lucid, Jamesian central consciousness, Ford increases this challenge by creating 'frequently vague, rough edged, not yet fully coherent' perspectives.¹⁶⁸ Ford and Conrad also tend to fragment their narratives, inviting the reader to work even harder at coming up with the whole, but also to reflect on the process.¹⁶⁹

A final set of observations to make here about James, Conrad and Ford's comparable aesthetics relates to time. They share a resistance to closure or finality and an affinity for the open ending, emphasising both the instability and continuous nature of interpretation.¹⁷⁰ The latter is not only endless, but also seldom linear, and Ford and Conrad shy away from creating temporally continuous narratives. For Armstrong they 'transform anticipation and

¹⁶² Ford Madox Ford, 'On Impressionism (1914)', in *Modernism: An Anthology*, ed. by Lawrence Rainey (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), pp.566-77 (p.570).

¹⁶³ Paul B. Armstrong, *The Challenge of Bewilderment: Understanding and Representation in James, Conrad, and Ford* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp.ix, 1.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.3.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.19.

¹⁶⁶ Frank Kermode, 'Novels: Recognition and Deception', *Critical Enquiry*, 1 (1974), 102-21 (p.106).

¹⁶⁷ Hampson, pp.21-2.

¹⁶⁸ Armstrong, p.19.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.17, 19-20.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.22.

retrospection from implicit processes of understanding into explicit, problematic issues in the very experience of reading their texts'.¹⁷¹ Discussing the relationship that developed between 'new' novelists, such as James, Conrad and Ford, and their readers shortly after the turn of the nineteenth century, Frank Kermode referred to 'the art of collaboration'; he explained that 'the more reflexive, the more technique- and theory-obsessed the fiction, the more it asked its readers to give up and the more it asked them to supply'.¹⁷² However, collaboration also affords the reader greater freedom. Sara Haslam wrote in relation to the gap that Kermode identified between novelist and text, and between text and reader, that '[f]reedom is given to the reader [...], freedom from omniscience and from "authoritative correction"'.¹⁷³ It is, exactly as James called it, a gap 'to glory in'.¹⁷⁴

Saunders assigned James, Conrad and Ford to a shared modernist network, based in southern Kent around 1900.¹⁷⁵ According to Helen Chambers, Conrad helped to create a vibrant correspondence network in south-east England that connected 'struggling writers' via the region's extensive railway network and efficient postal service, resulting in a community of writers and readers outside London.¹⁷⁶ At this time James and Wharton, as an emerging writer, embarked tentatively on a friendship that would last the rest of his life and ever after inform appraisals of her work (*EW*, pp.213, 221). Despite her liberation from James' shadow by modern criticism, Wharton scholarship that fails to mention James remains rare despite her having been the more successful and well-regarded writer in their lifetimes. Wharton and Conrad were not as close, but their connection reached beyond that of novelists reading one another's work. Conrad, for example, wrote a contribution for Wharton's *The Book of the Homeless*, published in 1916, and spent a day with her in Hyères in 1921 (*EW*, pp.491-2, 539-540). Wharton and Ford did not know each other directly, but had in common a friendship with James and coincidentally, despite their Parisian paths failing to cross, considerable admiration for France and the French.¹⁷⁷ Thus while Wharton is not conventionally, formally grouped with James, Conrad and Ford in either a modernist or impressionist sense, she was part of their broader social and literary landscape. I suggest that, influenced by James, Conrad and Ford, Wharton selectively practised her own kind of impressionism that reflected her concerns over the position and prospects of contemporary women. Her resistance to 'unrestrained detailed descriptions' of love scenes in *The Age of*

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p.23.

¹⁷² Frank Kermode, 'The English Novel, circa 1907', in *Essays on Fiction 1971-82* (London: Routledge, 1983), pp.33-51 (p.41).

¹⁷³ Sara Haslam, *Fragmenting Modernism: Ford Madox Ford, the Novel and the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p.194.

¹⁷⁴ Kermode, 'Novels', p.106.

¹⁷⁵ Saunders, p.ix; also see Haslam, *Fragmenting*, p.x.

¹⁷⁶ Helen Chambers, *Conrad's Reading: Space, Time, Networks* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p.139.

¹⁷⁷ Hermione Lee, "In Separate Directions": Ford Madox Ford and French Networks', in *Ford Madox Ford, France and Provence*, ed. by Dominique Lemarchal and Claire Davison-Pégon (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011) pp.43-56 (pp.48-9).

Innocence, for example, was favourably compared with that of James and Conrad in the *New York Times Book Review*.¹⁷⁸ Thus her connection with the impressionists was recognised by some contemporary reviewers, although others denied its existence.¹⁷⁹

Jesse Matz's account of literary impressionism traced, among other things, a historical lack of consensus about the concept, even at its highpoint around the turn of the nineteenth century.¹⁸⁰ It also drew out contemporary criticisms describing impressionism as lacking virility and vigour, and appealing principally to women and 'unmanly' men.¹⁸¹ Ford railed against this emasculation of his occupation.¹⁸² But as demonstrated by Dorothy Richardson's (1873-1957) 'feminine impressionism', debate over the objectives and techniques of contemporary novelists also inspired and expedited experimentation.¹⁸³ Is this what Wharton was doing? She claimed that while she conceived her 'subjects like a man', she executed them 'like a woman' (*EW*, p.209). Within this context, her use of the term 'conceive' is significant. She presents herself as imagining the subjects of male writers, but yielding to her womanly instincts in their execution, while the imagery of pregnancy and mothering disrupts and complicates the seemingly simple gendered divisions that she draws. Perhaps her statement alludes to disapproving contemporary views on impressionism. I examine in Chapter 2 if she employed women's secrets in particular as part of a gendered impressionist aesthetic that plays with gaps and omissions, temporal distortions and open endings that draws the bewildered reader, to borrow Armstrong's term, into a narrative process that insists on collaboration with the novelist. The requirement to render secrets on the page to the greatest effect gives rise to temporal shifts in a narrative, to details hinted at but not fully disclosed. Secrets not only resist finality, but feed into the notion of plural realities because information that is withheld cannot but give rise to plural understandings, among both fictional characters and readers. The result could be what Joslin called a 'sense of the inexplicable disarrangement of all we seek to order' in her work, when she suggested linking Wharton with Conrad, Joyce and Woolf.¹⁸⁴

1.2. Modernism and psychology

In a study on empathy in literature, Megan Hammond considered the connection between modernism and psychological discourses of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century

¹⁷⁸ James W. Tuttleton, Kristin O. Lauer and Margaret P. Murray, eds, *Edith Wharton: The Contemporary Reviews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p.286.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.287.

¹⁸⁰ Matz, pp.12-9.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp.82-3.

¹⁸² Haslam, *Fragmenting*, p.207.

¹⁸³ Deborah Parsons, *Theorists of the Modernist Novel: James Joyce, Dorothy Richardson, Virginia Woolf* (London: Routledge, 2007), p.31.

¹⁸⁴ Joslin, *Women Writers*, p.133.

that focuses on the ‘psychological distance between individuals’.¹⁸⁵ She explored especially ‘the inward-turning branch of modernism’, created by authors like James, Ford and Richardson.¹⁸⁶ Like his brother William James (1842-1910), author of the influential *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), Henry James was devoted to the study and portrayal of human thought and sought to do so through his writing of fiction. William James’ earlier work in particular draws attention to the difficulty of knowing the content of another’s consciousness, and literary impressionist Henry James’ fiction mirrors this concern.¹⁸⁷

Setting aside her disregard for the field of psychoanalysis, Wharton herself regularly draws attention to the existence, if not always the exact content, of her characters’ inner worlds. Goodman noted that the novelist’s autobiography does not allow readers into her own ‘secret-story world’, but it does quite happily admit to her possessing such a world and even, as a little girl, awakening to her own, individual consciousness (*ABG*, p.2).¹⁸⁸ Indeed, as an artist Wharton understood that literature is a ‘contemplation of life that goes below its [the tale’s] surface’.¹⁸⁹ Intellectually she resisted focusing on Freudian notions of self and a subconscious that undermines an individual’s free will.¹⁹⁰ In a letter to Berenson she likened Freudianism to sewerage, calling the subconscious something to be ‘grub[bed] after’ (*EW*, p.549). In practice Wharton would have found it difficult to avoid contemporary cultural absorption of Sigmund Freud’s (1856-1939) ideas and included a definite layer of psychology in her writing that, at least on occasion, engaged with psychoanalytical concepts in particular. Wharton was familiar with the work of William James; George Ramsden’s catalogue of works in her library lists a copy of his later *The Will to Believe (and Other Essays in Popular Psychology)* (1897), while the work of her friend Vernon Lee on aesthetics was influenced by *The Principles of Psychology*.¹⁹¹ She herself admits to a ‘habit of over-psychologizing’, while Benstock described Wharton’s 1910 anthology, *Tales of Men and Ghosts*, as exploring ‘the human psyche rather than purely social situations or the worlds of ghosts and goblins’, and tracing ‘a symptomatology of fear, desire, obsession, and repression’, characteristic of psychoanalytical theories (*NG*, pp.156, 243). Interestingly, she distinguished between Wharton’s novels, as providing ‘satires of contemporary experience’,

¹⁸⁵ Megan Marie Hammond, *Empathy and the Psychology of Literary Modernism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), p.3.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.4.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.32-3.

¹⁸⁸ Susan Goodman, ‘Competing Visions of Freud in the Memoirs of Ellen Glasgow and Edith Wharton’, *Colby Quarterly*, 25 (1989), 218-26 (p.222).

¹⁸⁹ Edith Wharton, ‘The Criticism of Fiction’, *The Times Literary Supplement*, 643 (1914), 229-30 (p.230).

¹⁹⁰ Goodman, ‘Competing’, p.218; also see Dale M. Bauer, ‘Wharton’s “Others”: Addiction and Intimacy’, in *A Historical Guide to Edith Wharton*, ed. by Carol J. Singley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp.115-45 (p.123).

¹⁹¹ Mandy Gagel, ‘1897, A Discussion of Plagiarism: Letters Between Vernon Lee, Bernard Berenson, and Mary Costelloe’, *Literary Imagination*, 12 (2010), 154-79 (p.156); George Ramsden, *Edith Wharton’s Library: A Catalogue* (Settrington: Stone Trough Books, 1999); Cecelia Tichi, ‘Emerson, Darwin, and *The Custom of the Country*’, in *A Historical Guide to Edith Wharton*, ed. by Carol J. Singley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp.89-114 (p.105).

and shorter fiction, used to ‘probe the psychological and parapsychological worlds’ (NG, p.243).

Given psychology’s concern with secrecy, and the prevalence of fictional secrets right across Wharton’s body of work, Benstock’s reading seems overly categorical. Secrets are, by their very nature, relevant to a study of thought. They actively prevent access to the contents of another’s mind. In addition, the behaviour that surrounds secrets, both by those who own them and those who wish to discover them, has psychological dimensions and is contingent on, for example, an individual’s determination, mental agility, willingness to mislead and ability to evaluate others and their motivations. A plot constructed around fictional secrets cannot but have a psychological angle, regardless of genre. Moreover, the almost systematic inclusion of women’s secrets in Wharton’s plots may just indicate a methodological secret belonging to the novelist herself, namely that they represent the executive function, the brain, of her texts. In the same way that Wharton viewed civilisation as a controlling force over, and protector against, human nature – a view that she happened to share with Freud – women’s secrets may function as a bulwark against the uncontrollable in her texts.¹⁹² It is unlikely that such a unifying thread only served to express Wharton’s social concerns and interests. Kermode wrote regarding Henry Fielding’s (1707-1754) relationship with his audience, that ‘the reassurance of continuity and non-novelty is useful to the business of selling’.¹⁹³ He also suggested that James, Conrad and Ford stopped short of transferring all authority to interpret to the reader, either due to an ‘inheritance of inertia, or a need to sell books’.¹⁹⁴ These ideas would apply equally to Wharton and her readers. Women’s secrets in her writing, and the reader’s expectation of women’s secrets in her writing, function executively on two levels: one pragmatic and commercial, the other intellectual and imaginative. The result was a transactional relationship with her readers that brought Wharton commercial success alongside critical acclaim during her lifetime. The *New York Times Book Review* captured Wharton’s blend of popular and critical appeal in its assessment of *The Age of Innocence*:

It was *The House of Mirth* (1905) that gave Mrs. Wharton an international reputation; if one wishes to see how far her art has advanced since that popular book, one has merely to compare it with *The Age of Innocence*. By the side of the absolute mastery of plot, character and style displayed in her latest novel, *The House of Mirth* seems almost crude.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹² Goodman, ‘Competing’, p.225.

¹⁹³ Kermode, ‘Novels’, p.105.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p.117.

¹⁹⁵ Tuttleton, Lauer and Murray, p.284.

1.3. Theory of secrets

‘A path, a riddle, a jewel, an oath – anything can be secret so long as it is kept intentionally hidden, set apart in the mind of its keeper as requiring concealment’.¹⁹⁶ So wrote Sissela Bok. She explained that a secret may be shared with no one, with someone, or with all but one. The point is that information is kept from reaching someone else, and intentionally so, by the possessor of the secret. For Bok, secrecy’s defining trait is concealment, while it inherently separates the insider and outsider. Sacredness, intimacy and privacy, prohibition, furtiveness, deception and silence are concepts related to secrecy, although they are not necessarily part of every secret.¹⁹⁷ Bok described silence in particular as ‘the first defense of secrets’. The Greek form, *arretos*, first meant ‘the unspoken’, before it began to encompass also ‘the unspeakable, the ineffable, and the prohibited, sometimes also the abominable and the shameful, and then the secret in all its shadings’.¹⁹⁸ Wharton’s writing exhibits the range of issues that people may conceal, varying degrees of secret sharing and exclusive effects of secrecy that Bok discerned, with a connecting thread of silences and silencing running through it. In this study I distinguish secrets from silences, despite the connection and inevitable overlap between them, for finer-grained exploration of the two phenomena. While silences often protect secrets, non-speech acts also occur in contexts that are unrelated to the concealment of information.

Matei Calinescu built on Bok’s ideas by defining secrecy as ‘conscious concealment of meaning’, as ‘information deliberately set aside, withheld or disguised’ and thus outside the ‘circuit of social/personal communication’.¹⁹⁹ The emphasis falls on intentionality, chiming with Bok’s work, but also with much earlier sociological thinking around secrecy.²⁰⁰ Wharton criticism often makes reference to the sociology of her contemporary, Georg Simmel (1858-1918).²⁰¹ Thus far, establishing Wharton’s first-hand familiarity with Simmel’s writings has proven problematic. Her extensive library does not appear to have included copies of his published work, and existing Wharton scholarship cites no proof that connects her directly with Simmel.²⁰² There is a fair amount of circumstantial evidence that

¹⁹⁶ Sissela Bok, *Secrets: On the Ethics of Concealment and Revelation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p.5.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.6.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.7.

¹⁹⁹ Matei Calinescu, ‘Secrecy in Fiction: Textual and Intertextual Secrets in Hawthorne and Updike’, *Poetics Today*, 15 (1994), 443-65 (p.443).

²⁰⁰ Also see Matei Calinescu, *Rereading* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p.244.

²⁰¹ For example, Nancy Bentley, ‘Wharton, Travel, and Modernity’, in *A Historical Guide to Edith Wharton*, ed. by Carol J. Singley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp.147-79; Clare Virginia Eby, ‘Silencing Women in Edith Wharton’s *The Age of Innocence*’, *Colby Quarterly*, 28 (1992), 93-104; Meredith Goldsmith, ‘“Other People’s Clothes”: Homosociality, Consumer Culture, and Affective Reading in Edith Wharton’s *Summer*’, *Legacy: A Journal of American Women Writers*, 27 (2010), 109-27; Lori Merish, ‘Engendering Naturalism: Narrative Form and Commodity Spectacle in U.S. Naturalist Fiction’, in *Edith Wharton’s The House of Mirth: A Casebook*, ed. by Carol J. Singley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp.229-70.

²⁰² See Ramsden.

James was familiar with Simmel's work.²⁰³ If Wharton did not read Simmel herself, she almost certainly encountered his ideas during unrecorded exchanges with James. Simmel called secrecy 'purposeful concealment'.²⁰⁴ In addition, he drew attention to the exclusiveness surrounding secrecy, and the perceived value of whatever is known to those privy to a secret.²⁰⁵ Finally, he commented on the 'fascination of betrayal'.²⁰⁶ Secrets are accompanied by the knowledge that they may be betrayed, and thus lend power to secret keepers. They hold 'the power of surprises, turns of fate, joy, destruction – if only, perhaps, of self-destruction'.²⁰⁷ Sharable secrets, secrets that may be revealed and thus cease to be secret, are what Jacques Derrida called conditional secrets and associated with power over others.²⁰⁸ Calinescu also picked up on the possibility for secrets to be revealed; they may be 'disclosed, made public, betrayed, guessed, or independently discovered by those whom it is designed to exclude'.²⁰⁹ He argued that the constant possibility of self-betrayal flows from the burden of secrecy, and a 'deep-seated, mysterious nostalgia for transparency' or confession.²¹⁰

Theory also suggests that the power of secrets extends beyond the potential advantages to those who might betray them. Protecting a secret may bring certain advantages. Both Carl Jung (1875-1961) and Simmel associated secrets with individuation. According to Simmel, 'social conditions of strong personal differentiation permit and require secrecy in high degree; and conversely, the secret embodies and intensifies such differentiation'.²¹¹ In contrast, the money economy, that displaced domestic production and barter economies and that characterises the metropolis, advances anonymity and hinders individual differentiation; money 'is concerned only with what is common to all: it asks for the exchange value, it reduces all quality and individuality [achieved via secrecy] to the question: How much?'.²¹² Jung similarly noted that 'the individual on his lonely path needs a secret which for various reasons he may not or cannot reveal. Such a secret reinforces him in the isolation of his individual aims'. The need for a secret is so forceful that the individual may find 'himself involved in ideas and actions for which he is no longer responsible'.²¹³ This does not mean

²⁰³ Adam C. Stier, 'Henry James's "The Friends of the Friends" and the Emergence of Social Network Theory', *LATCH*, 7 (2014), 55-95 (p.60).

²⁰⁴ Georg Simmel, 'The Sociology of Secrecy and of Secret Societies', *American Journal of Sociology*, 11 (1906), 441-98 (p.462).

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.464-5.

²⁰⁶ Georg Simmel, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, trans. by Kurt H. Wolff (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1950), p.333.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.333-4.

²⁰⁸ Segal, p.190; also see Jacques Derrida, 'Passions: "An Oblique Offering"', in *On the Name*, trans. by David Wood (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), pp.3-31 (pp.25, 30).

²⁰⁹ Calinescu, *Rereading*, p.228.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.244-5.

²¹¹ Simmel, *The Sociology*, pp.334-5.

²¹² Georg Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', in *Classic Essays on the Culture of Cities*, ed. by Richard Sennett (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1969), pp.47-60 (p.49).

²¹³ Carl G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (London: Fontana Press, 1995), pp.376-7.

that secrets are necessarily illegitimate or shameful, although they may well be experienced as such.²¹⁴ As a consequence, we keep aspects of ourselves secret to avoid being misunderstood or rejected.²¹⁵ As Jung pointed out, psychiatry as a profession is concerned with the revelation of secrets, ‘a story that is not told, and which as a rule no one knows of’, and that ‘therapy only really begins after the investigation of that wholly personal story’.²¹⁶ However, he expounded the value of secrets to the development of an individual identity, based largely on his own intriguing childhood experiences of withholding information.²¹⁷ In an introduction to a work on secrecy and the law, Kim Lane Scheppele also considered the dual character of secrets: they forge social alliances and divisions, ‘social spaces that are shared and those that are partitioned off from others’, but withholding information may also be a powerful tool, used to achieve certain goals.²¹⁸ Other aspects of secrecy include double-coded messages that provide the layperson with one set of information and another to the initiate, along with instruction that the latter is not to be divulged.²¹⁹ I employ these connected ideas on the nature and roles of secrecy to explore the effects of intentional concealment of information in Wharton’s narratives, but also make use of secrecy theory that specifically relates to literature.

Calinescu identified four ways in which intentional concealment or secrecy manifests in literature, the first three of which inform my analysis: (1) narrative structure essentially comprises the sequential, intentional concealment and/or disclosure of information; (2) a narrative may give its reader access to fictional secrets of fictional characters; (3) narrative revelations may be made in a way that engages a reader beyond simply reading to discover what happens next; (4) finally, concealment in a text may rest on intertextuality; the meaning of one text may be found in another.²²⁰ The first form of secrecy is integral to the writer’s process itself; it is the calculated release of information at strategic moments and in strategic ways to create a persuasive and engaging fictional world. I consider this mode of secrecy as far as it facilitates the second form of secrecy, namely the withholding and disclosure of fictional secrets. Making a reader privy to narrative secrets of the kind involved in the second form of secrecy advances plot and is also connected to the creation of dramatic irony, which by definition involves ideas of inclusion or exclusion and reflects the creation of alliances or divisions that Lane Scheppele associated with secrets. A novel’s

²¹⁴ Christopher Hauke, ‘Keeping Secrets (and Deciding What Can Be Told): Individuation, Power and the Red Book’, *International Journal of Jungian Studies*, 3 (2011), 159-68 (p.160).

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.162.

²¹⁶ Jung, p.138; also see Hauke, p.166.

²¹⁷ Hauke, p.166.

²¹⁸ Kim Lane Scheppele, *Legal Secrets: Equality and Efficiency in the Common Law* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), p.5.

²¹⁹ Calinescu, *Rereading*, p.228.

²²⁰ Calinescu, ‘Secrecy’, pp.448-9, 454.

action hinges on such secrets; their discovery or confession encourages sequential reading, or reading for the story.²²¹ Wharton's use of omniscient narration, which often provides insight into her characters' interior worlds by employing free indirect discourse, facilitates the inclusion and revelation of secrets, and thus plot. She allows the reader the pleasure of discovering something, or a hint of something, that her fictional characters hide from each other. Wharton also tends to establish a central consciousness in her narratives through focalisation, as in *The Age of Innocence*.

As Calinescu's third and fourth forms of secrecy indicate, 'implied textual or intertextual meaning' may be seen as a 'ludic challenge and as a way of rewarding readerly ingenuity, knowledge, experience, and devoted attention'.²²² Calinescu emphasised that such textual or intertextual secrets are not exclusionary, but meant to encourage reflective re-reading, rather than sequential reading.²²³ Re-reading by an outsider – a reader who is yet to discover the secret – depends on a suspicion that a text has one apparent meaning along with a second hidden one; it depends on reading 'between the lines' for the double-coded message, trying to discover that which is hidden, and why.²²⁴ Various mechanisms, including narrative point of view, emphases on unexpected details, details that defy easy interpretation and apparent inconsistencies, may arouse such suspicion. The ludic motivation is an important reason for re-reading, related to exploring the formal elements of a text as one might play a game governed by clear rules.²²⁵ Kermode went one step further than Calinescu. For him textual secrets conflict with narrative sequence; some texts (notably Conrad's *Under Western Eyes* [1911]) may only become sequentially readable when their textual secrets are repressed, dismissed as 'noise'.²²⁶ In truth, some texts may only become readable when their textual secrets are repressed. Think, for example, about the unspeakable never-spoken 'horror' in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) or the fragments of incest in Ford's *The Good Soldier* (1915).²²⁷ In the process two audiences or constituencies of readers may be attracted; one is large and popular, the other small and sophisticated and consisting of 'secret sharers'.²²⁸

Wharton's novels were read by a large and popular audience that was reached via both serialisation and volume-text publication. Hers are novels of manners after all, and novels of the marketplace. Yet the process of re-reading Wharton's narratives accentuates issues

²²¹ Ibid., pp.450, 454.

²²² Ibid., pp.444-5.

²²³ Ibid., p.445.

²²⁴ Calinescu, *Rereading*, pp.242-3.

²²⁵ Ibid., pp.256-7.

²²⁶ Kermode, 'Secrets', pp.87, 92, 100.

²²⁷ Haslam, *Fragmenting*, p.59; Sara Haslam, 'Introduction', in Ford Madox Ford, *The Good Soldier*, ed. by Sara Haslam (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2010), pp.5-20 (p.13).

²²⁸ Calinescu, 'Secrecy', pp.446-7.

suggesting that they were also designed to be read by a smaller, sophisticated audience, eager to discover their textual secrets. Such an audience consists of attentive, intensive readers, or Calinescu's reflective re-readers who, literally or figuratively speaking, turn back a page to confirm a detail, who note an inconsistency or a gap, who question the meaning of what is disclosed and of what appears to be hidden. A re-reader of Wharton's novels, especially in volume-text format, is also ideally placed to recognise, revisit and reflect on what she does not say explicitly. Kermode acknowledged the theory of textual intentionality, which may contradict the empirical author's view on the interpretation of a text. While the author's view is important, intended but secret, or open, intertextuality facilitates other hidden meanings, unforeseen by the author.²²⁹ This does not undermine the likelihood that an author intentionally invites his or her readers to participate in a game of discovery through the use of intertextuality. Wharton undoubtedly does this, but intertextual allusions do not appear directly connected to her handling of secrets in narratives. Nevertheless, her considerable business acumen and use of secrets across her own works to keep her readers returning for more is significant. British readers in particular were increasingly fascinated with secrecy and willing to pay for novels that explored this topic during the nineteenth century; Leila May called them 'emotionally and intellectually involved with the novelistic treatment of desperate efforts to protect secrets and sensational attempts to reveal them'.²³⁰

2. Silence

Searching one of several digital editions of Wharton's 'collected works' produces at least 500 instances of the words 'silence', 'silences' and 'silenced', and at least another 500 instances of 'silent' or 'silently' occurring in her published writing. I investigate this remarkable yet under-explored preoccupation with silence by employing the critical framework that follows.

2.1. A brief history of beneficial silences

John Gale and Beatriz Sanchez's brief history of silence in philosophy emphasises the appreciation of silence in the classical world and beyond. They pointed out that Pythagoras is credited with the notion that 'the wise man is known by the fewness of his words', and that the value of silence was recognised widely by followers of religious and philosophical asceticism.²³¹ Speech was generally limited in early Pythagorean communities, and initiates observed a five-year period of silence.²³² According to Isocrates in *Busiris* 28, 'even in the

²²⁹ Ibid., p.460.

²³⁰ Leila Silvana May, *Secrecy and Disclosure in Victorian Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2017), p.4.

²³¹ John Gale and Beatriz Sanchez, 'The Meaning and Function of Silence in Psychotherapy with Particular Reference to a Therapeutic Community Treatment Programme', *Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy*, 19 (2005), 205-20 (p.206).

²³² Carol Poster, 'Silence as a Rhetorical Strategy in Neoplatonic Mysticism', *Mystics Quarterly*, 24 (1998), 48-73 (p.51).

fourth century people [would] “marvel more at the silence of those who profess to be his [Pythagoras] pupils than at those who have the greatest reputation for speaking””; Isocrates noted the self-control that characterised Pythagorean silence in the context of an education system that emphasised public speaking.²³³ Pythagorean thinking is often connected to the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, at least a century and a half later.²³⁴ Plato held that there

does not exist nor will there ever exist any treatise of mine dealing with [the subject I seriously study]. For it does not admit at all of verbal expression like other studies, but, as a result of continued application to the subject itself and communion therewith, it is brought to birth in the soul on a sudden as light that is kindled by a leaping spark, and thereafter it nourishes itself.²³⁵

In turn the influence of this notion, expressed in Plato’s *Epistle VII*, on the theory of Neoplatonic rhetoric that considered ‘persuasion futile, speech misleading, and interpretation uncertain’, is evident.²³⁶ In Neoplatonic thought, ascetic admiration of silence became connected to its therapeutic benefits too. According to this view the transformation from inauthentic to authentic ‘presence-to-oneself’ led both to self-discovery and deeper interpersonal relationships.²³⁷ Those wishing such a transformation had to engage in a ‘process of working through, continual inquiry and deep examination (*skepsis*)’, along with ‘periods of withdrawal into silent attentiveness (*prosochē*)’.²³⁸

It is unclear whether Wharton – who had ‘a lifetime interest in classical forms and ideas’, and a collection of classical plays and poetry complemented by books on Greek religion and philosophy – was aware of the classical history of silence (*MMS*, p.168). However, having read Robert Curzon, she was at least familiar with the history of monasticism in what was known as the Levant, including that of the rise of Coptic monasticism and hermitism in Egypt, where ‘the Anchorites, in the early ages of Christianity, retired from the world in order to pass their lives in prayer and contemplation, and in mortification of the flesh’.²³⁹ And the influence of classical thinking was still evident by late antiquity in Upper Egypt where Besa, biographer of Shenoute, abbot of the Coptic White Monastery, connected silence with understanding and insight – and ‘[o]ffensive talk and idle chatter’ with the deterioration of fellowship – while what is essentially the ‘psychological value of silence and its connection to self awareness’ later also characterised medieval Christendom, and even twentieth-century European traditions of thought.²⁴⁰ Benedict warned monks against

²³³ Carl Huffman, ‘Pythagoras’, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2018/entries/pythagoras/>> [accessed 28 December 2019].

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

²³⁵ Poster, p.50.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

²³⁷ Gale and Sanchez, p.206.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

²³⁹ Robert Curzon, *Visits to Monasteries in the Levant* (London: John Murray, 1849), p.76.

²⁴⁰ Gale and Sanchez, p.207; K.H. Kuhn, ‘A Fifth-Century Egyptian Abbot: II. Monastic Life in Besa’s Day’, *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 2 (1954), 174-87 (p.183).

‘murmuring, gossip, and grumbling’ which, according to Brox, ‘undercut their efforts to prove worthy of God’, but like Besa, Benedict also recognised the destructive potential of gossip on an isolated community.²⁴¹ Medieval Cistercians generally were to speak with ‘discipline’. Those who conducted the business of the abbey, spoke as required; everyone else listened quietly and learnt from their superior, teacher or priest.²⁴² Such a dynamic requires a remarkable degree of obedience, but one that ultimately facilitates hearing. Indeed, Brox has noted that the Latin root for the verb ‘to obey’, *oboedire*, comes from *audire*, ‘to hear’, and that listening fully and conversing meaningfully require silence.²⁴³

2.2. *The historical silencing of women*

The history briefly outlined above emphasises the perceived advantages of silences that are both demanded of and chosen by, generally although not exclusively, male practitioners. There is, however, another kind of silence, namely the oppressive silencing of women. Mary Beard recently observed that the history of silencing women reaches back to the earliest examples of western literature, to Homer’s *Odyssey*, where the young Telemachus tells his mother Penelope to keep quiet. Beard noted specifically that Telemachus’ choice of words, ‘speech will be the business of men, all men, and of me most of all; for mine is the power of this household’, holds particular significance.²⁴⁴ The ancient Greek for ‘speech’, *muthos*, does not refer to ‘chatting, prattling or gossip’, but to the ‘authoritative public speech’ of men.²⁴⁵ She castigated James for suggesting centuries later that American women are bound to turn language into a ‘generalized mumble or jumble, a tongueless slobber or snarl or whine’ – unlikely descriptors for the ‘speech of men’.²⁴⁶

When James derided the speech of American women he participated in an age-old tradition that suppressed women’s voices and that had made its way to colonial America via centuries of English common law. The silencing of women is inextricable from their historical marginal social status, which is exemplified by the legal position of married women in earlier centuries. Between 1765 and 1770 the English jurist Sir William Blackstone (1723-1780) published his four-volume *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, which in time would form the cornerstone of legal education at English and North American

²⁴¹ Brox, pp.70-1.

²⁴² Ibid., pp.69-70.

²⁴³ Ibid., p.70.

²⁴⁴ Mary Beard, *Women and Power: A Manifesto* (London: Profile Books, 2017), pp.3-4.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., p.6.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., pp.28-9; Henry James, ‘The Speech of American Women’, in *Henry James on Culture: Collected Essays on Politics and the American Social Scene*, ed. by Pierre A. Walker (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), pp.58-81 (p.76).

universities.²⁴⁷ In Volume I, Blackstone described the legal position of married women as follows:

By marriage the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband: under whose wing, protection, and *cover*, she performs every thing [...].²⁴⁸

Legally, a wife's *couverture* translated into her husband's responsibility for misbehaviour on her part. As a result, he was allowed 'by the old law' to 'give his wife moderate correction'.²⁴⁹

For, as he is to answer for her misbehavior, the law thought it reasonable to intrust him with his power of restraining her, by domestic chastisement, in the same moderation that a man is allowed to correct his servants or children; for whom the master or parent is also liable in some cases to answer.²⁵⁰

Blackstone was quick to explain that under Charles II (1630-1685) 'this power of correction began to be doubted: and a wife may now have security of the peace against her husband'; until this point, however, 'the husband was prohibited to use any violence to his wife [...] otherwise than lawfully and reasonably belongs to the husband for the due government and correction of his wife', which under civil law allowed him 'for some misdemeanors [...] to beat his wife severely with scourges and sticks' while others attracted 'more moderate chastisement'.²⁵¹ Blackstone found, though, that 'the lower rank of people, who were always fond of the old common law' continued to 'claim and exert their antient privilege: and the courts of law will still permit a husband to restrain a wife of her liberty, in case of any gross misbehaviour'.²⁵²

A married woman's *couverture*, then, did not guarantee her private safety at all, even in an 'enlightened', eighteenth-century England. A misdemeanor that drew especially cruel and public chastisement involved the act of speaking and it is here that James' comment is thrown into sharp relief. Under English common law a scold, or *communis risatrix*, was 'a public nuisance to her neighbourhood'.²⁵³ She disturbed her neighbours' peace through 'loud quarreling, gossiping, slanderous speech or brawling'.²⁵⁴ If indicted, one possible sentence was the ducking stool, 'an engine of correction' that allowed for a woman to be plunged into

²⁴⁷ Wilfrid Prest 'General Editor's Introduction', in William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England: Book 1: Of the Rights of Persons*, ed. by David Lemmings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp.vii-xv (pp.xii-xiv).

²⁴⁸ William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England: Book the First* (Dublin: John Exshaw, Henry Saunders, Boulter Grierson, and James Williams, 1769), p.442.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.444.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁵¹ William Blackstone, *Commentaries on The Laws of England: Book 1: Of the Rights of Persons*, ed. by David Lemmings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp.286-7.

²⁵² Blackstone, *Book the First*, p.445.

²⁵³ William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England: Book the Fourth* (Dublin: John Exshaw, Henry Saunders, Boulter Grierson, Elizabeth Lynch, James Williams, John Milliken, Joseph Sheppard, Charles Ingham, and Thomas Walker, 1769), p.169.

²⁵⁴ Anon., 'Scold's bridle', The British Library, n.d. <<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/scolds-bridle>> [accessed 1 January 2020].

water as punishment.²⁵⁵ There was, however, also an illegal yet widely employed alternative punishment, called the ‘scold’s bridle’.²⁵⁶ According to Dubravka Ugrešić such bridles, now museum pieces, were used from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries in England, Wales, Scotland and Germany ‘to punish women who had a lashing, scathing tongue, to punish chatterboxes, gossips, busybodies, yentas, yakety yaks, nags, harpies, shrews, vixens, quibblers, spitfires, hags, magpies, blabbermouths, loudmouths, prattlers, tattletales, hawkers, fussbudgets, floozies...’.²⁵⁷

An example of a scold’s bridle, also known as a ‘brank’s bridle’ or simply as ‘branks’, in the British Library’s collection is made of heavy iron and includes a pair of twisting horns. The wearer of a scold’s bridle, like a woman heading for the ducking stool, would have been mocked as she was paraded in public. Most important, however, is how a scold’s bridle physically impaired its wearer. The bridle would have included a sharp metal slab to restrain the tongue and temporarily mute its wearer.²⁵⁸ This slab could have measured between one-and-a-half to three inches, made it hard to swallow, and could cause gagging. Another feature of scold’s bridles was a strip of iron attached to the collar and arching back to front over the head. It split into two across the face to press down against the nose or onto the cheeks to inhibit breathing.²⁵⁹ The ducking stool was the most common punishment for gossips and scolds in the American colonies. However, the scold’s bridle also made its way to the New World where women were sometimes gagged and displayed in the market square with placards outlining their misdemeanors. At other times a cleft stick was used to fasten their tongues.²⁶⁰

Such extreme forms of silencing are remarkable for their cruelty, their widespread application over several centuries to correct the perceived offences of half the population, and their physical and symbolic rejection of the notion that women, like men, have the right to speak. But they were not used exclusively to silence women. Use of the bridle to torture enslaved people, as reported by the abolitionist Olaudah Equiano (1740-1797), reinforces the brutality of the device. The astonishing life story of Equiano whose name in his mother tongue, Igbo, means ‘having a loud voice and well spoken’, included his capture by slavers as a child in the Kingdom of Benin in present-day Nigeria and his transportation via slave

²⁵⁵ Blackstone, *Book the Fourth*, p.169.

²⁵⁶ Anon., ‘Scold’s bridle’, <<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/scolds-bridle>>.

²⁵⁷ Dubravka Ugrešić, ‘The Scold’s Bridle’, trans. by Ellen Elias-Bursac, *World Literature Today*, 90 (2016), 36-42 (p.37).

²⁵⁸ Anon., ‘Scold’s bridle’, <<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/scolds-bridle>>; Ugrešić, p.37.

²⁵⁹ Brox, p.176.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., p.175.

ship to Barbados and then a plantation in Virginia.²⁶¹ There he first encountered the scold's bridle:

[...] I was very much affrighted at some things I saw, and the more so as I had seen a black woman slave as I came through the house, who was cooking the dinner, and the poor creature was cruelly loaded with various kinds of iron machines; she had one particularly on her head, which locked her mouth so fast that she could not speak; and could not eat nor drink.²⁶²

Later he would realise that instruments used to brutalise slaves, such as the 'iron muzzle, thumb-screws, &c. are so well known, as not to need a description'.²⁶³ Corporal silencing as a tool of oppression is as much a part of the history of silence as constructive engagement with silence for its transformative, spiritual and psychological value, and inevitably also feeds into reading the roles of silence in Wharton's work.

2.3. *Classifying silences*

Today the classification of silences varies between disciplines, but I focus on what may be labeled as rhetorical, thematic, literary, psychological and environmental silences as part of a framework for thinking about Wharton's uses of silence in her writing. These categories are not mutually exclusive and may operate in conjunction, effectively to become nested silences. A thematic silence may, for example, occur within a natural one, or a rhetorical silence within a literary one.

Rhetoricians traditionally focus on words, but some view the spaces between and around words – silences – as equally informative.²⁶⁴ They are concerned specifically with the rhetorical impact of silences on others. In his explanation of the Gestalt principles of perception, Keith Grant-Davie claimed that we normally pay more attention to words than to the silences that surround them. However, if used rhetorically, silences become the 'figures' or what we focus on.²⁶⁵ This does not suggest that speech (and grammatical structure) is not constructed of words as well as the gaps that separate them, but merely that the importance of such gaps to verbal communication is not always recognised fully. This was also the conclusion reached by discourse analysts who, by the 1990s, began to view silence as more than a way to organise turn-taking in conversation.²⁶⁶ Stout saw the rhetorical use of silence as 'an invitation to the reader to perceive more than is said or to perceive the fact of the

²⁶¹ Werner Sollors, 'Introduction', in Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself*, ed. by Werner Sollors (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), pp.ix-xxxi (pp.x-xi).

²⁶² Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself*, ed. by Werner Sollors (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), p.44.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.79.

²⁶⁴ Keith Grant-Davie, 'Rhetorical Uses of Silences and Spaces', in *Silence and the Silenced*, ed. by Leslie Boldt, Corrado Federici and Ernesto Virgulti (New York: Peter Lang, 2013), pp.1-11 (p.1).

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.2.

²⁶⁶ Michal Ephratt, 'The Functions of Silence', *Journal of Pragmatics*, 40 (2008), 1909-38 (p.1910).

imposition of silence'.²⁶⁷ Jean Blackall picked up on a prominent feature in Wharton's writing already remarked upon by E.L. Thorndike in 1948 when she described ellipsis as 'a consistent practice in Edith Wharton's fiction', but used with specific objectives that include 'to suggest the colloquial quality of speech, to emulate the rhythms of thought, and to mark a point of mental realignment'.²⁶⁸ In her readings of Wharton, she found ellipsis used 'to express the inexpressible, or that which a character is unwilling to express, or that which the author chooses to withhold'.²⁶⁹ In terms of Stout's suggestion, Blackall emphasised the reader's involvement as indicated by ellipsis and employed by Wharton 'to entice the reader into imaginative collaboration with the writer', 'to invite the reader to follow up the line of thought, the consequences, the possibilities of a relationship, unassisted'.²⁷⁰ This is far removed from Thorndike's interpretation of the use of ellipsis as 'a veritable mania' among 'many recent writers', including Wharton, that decreases the 'intelligibility and interest of stories'.²⁷¹

Although Wharton does at times employ augmented ellipsis, perhaps most famously in the form of three lines of dots as a frame around the inner narrative of *Ethan Frome* (1911), she preferred three spaced dots rather than four to indicate an ellipsis, even at the end of a sentence, and most of all she sought consistency.²⁷² She was fastidious to a fault over her use of punctuation and demanded that her publishers defer to her in this regard right from the start of her writing career, as indicated by correspondence with John Murray, her first British publisher from 1900 to 1902. She wrote, for example, in connection with *The Valley of Decision* in February 1902:

I regret the delay very much, but, [...] the typographical errors, & confusion in paragraphing & punctuation have been so numerous in the last slips received from you [...]. I am sure you appreciate how much the value of a carefully written book, depends on the care with which the author's punctuation & paragraphing are followed [...].²⁷³

On this occasion Wharton demanded that someone at the publishing house 'take[s] the time & trouble to conform exactly to the American page-proofs' produced and forwarded by Scribner's.²⁷⁴ Scribner's were not always above reproach either, as shown by Lewis in connection with their production of *The Fruit of the Tree* in 1907

²⁶⁷ Stout, p.19.

²⁶⁸ Jean Frantz Blackall, 'Edith Wharton's Art of Ellipsis', *Journal of Narrative Technique*, 17 (1987), 145-62 (p.145). Wharton's predilection for ellipsis has been analysed also as part of a study of modernist practices in her short stories by Sarah Whitehead, 'Make It Short: Edith Wharton's Modernist Practices in Her Short Stories', *Journal of the Short Story in English*, 58 (2012), 25-34.

²⁶⁹ Blackall, p.145.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.145-6.

²⁷¹ E.L. Thorndike, 'The Psychology of Punctuation', *The American Journal of Psychology*, 61 (1948), 222-8 (pp.223, 225).

²⁷² Blackall, p.160.

²⁷³ Anna Girling, "'Comedy of Errors': The Correspondence between Edith Wharton and John Murray in the National Library of Scotland", *Edith Wharton Review*, 32 (2016), 61-79 (pp.61, 71).

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.71-2.

and particularly the typesetting of ellipsis: ‘There was also a long and intricate to-do about the spacing of dots at the end of sentences left unfinished in the text—to the point where Edith wondered dourly why the English handled their galleys so much better’ (*EWB*, p.182). Wharton would come to view Macmillan’s London editions of her books, which normally followed the New York editions, as the final and definitive versions of her work; their finalisation often involved corrections and lists of errata submitted by her at the last minute.²⁷⁵

According to Grant-Davie, listeners (or readers) will try to work out the meaning of rhetorical silences if they seem meaningful. Silences that are easy to interpret engender listener confidence.²⁷⁶ On the other hand, silences that defy their listeners create feelings of ambiguity, uncertainty and unease that may be exploited by the silent person.²⁷⁷ Grant-Davie also outlined how different types of silences may be described and distinguished, based on their rhetorical strength. Examples of silences are located across five scales. The top end of each scale has greater rhetorical strength than the bottom. A (1) voluntary silence, where a person chooses not to speak, has greater effect than an involuntary one; (2) significant and intentional silences have greater effect than incidental, absent-minded ones; (3) unexpected silences surpass expected ones in effect, (4) active silences surpass static ones, and (5) temporal silences surpass topical ones. The first two scales reflect the silent person’s control over the silence. The next two scales, however, concern listener perception of silence.²⁷⁸ Expected silences have the potential to be highly rhetorical, but unexpected ones may be viewed as the ‘prototypical kind of silence’, ‘the meaningful absence of speech’ as described by Adam Jaworski.²⁷⁹ Active and static silences relate to the extent of the listener’s focus on the silence. An active silence is the main point of focus, while a static silence provides background to another activity. Silence in an examination hall is passive; a silence that suspends speech, making the listener aware of its existence, is active.²⁸⁰ Finally, temporal silences are periods of quiet, measurable in terms of time lapsing. Topical silences, however, can be quite noisy but refuse to address a particular topic.²⁸¹ The latter type of silence, also known as thematic silence, requires further consideration, especially with regard to its translation into fiction.

²⁷⁵ Towheed, ‘Introduction’, pp.35-6.

²⁷⁶ Grant-Davie, p.2.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.3.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*; Adam Jaworski, *The Power of Silence: Social and Pragmatic Perspectives* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1993), p.66.

²⁸⁰ Grant-Davie, pp.3-4.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.4.

Dennis Kurzon noted that thematic silences often occur in dialogue; ‘a person *when speaking* does not relate to a particular topic’.²⁸² Here it is not a case of the silent person not responding to a particular utterance, or of speechlessness, but of purposefully ignoring a topic. It is a ‘metaphorical expansion of actual silence’.²⁸³ Kurzon differed from Grant-Davie in suggesting that the refusal to address a particular topic is implicit. For Kurzon a thematic silence does not, for example, involve a speaker saying ‘no comment’, as it might for Grant-Davie; that would make the silence conversational, rather than thematic. Normally the decision to remain silent on a topic is internal and the reason for such silence comes from the speaker. Thematic silences can, however, also be influenced by external factors, for example by social norms or threat, regardless of the speaker’s personal feelings on the matter.²⁸⁴ Last, but not least, thematic silence may be connected to silencing; neglecting to address certain topics could be equivalent to denying their existence.²⁸⁵

Building on these ideas I suggest that the writer of fiction may introduce thematic silences in two ways, and that Edith Wharton employs both. The first is by creating characters who refuse or are unable to speak about certain topics, such as illicit or traumatic experiences, and the second by employing narrative styles that do so. The latter may include use of a first-person or limited third-person narrator who only ever provides a partial perspective. In contrast, a narrative style that complements and compensates for dialogic silences by providing the reader with insight into a character’s inner world and access to certain topics, is free indirect discourse. Free indirect discourse, however, lends access to more than otherwise unspoken-of topics in a text. It contributes to characterisation and a reader’s sense of understanding a character’s actions or speech acts, or their non-actions or non-speech acts. Silences simultaneously may have a critical role to play within the fictional world created by the author. A character’s refusal or inability to speak and/or use of rhetorical silences may be essential to characterisation, portrayal of a relationship between characters, a scene, the broader development of plot, and so forth. Blackall noted Wharton’s use of ellipsis in these contexts too, when characters ‘may choose to withhold information for their own good reasons’.²⁸⁶ I classify such silences, along with silences created by narrative styles, as literary silences produced by authorial choices.

While Wharton’s writing predated current critical theories on silence, it occurred within and/or exposes a socio-historical context that often valued codes of silence higher than it did

²⁸² Dennis Kurzon, ‘Towards a Typology of Silence’, *Journal of Pragmatics*, 39 (2007), 1673-88 (p.1677).

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp.1677, 1679.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.1678.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p.1684.

²⁸⁶ Blackall, p.156.

speech. Indeed, in an argument that views the novel as a ‘critique of the politics of silence’, Clare Eby asked whether Wharton’s

rhetorical reticence [in *The Age of Innocence*] aligns[s] her with old New York’s last stand as a unified, cohesive society before it is splintered by twentieth century anomie, or does she expose the reticence of old New York, showing its cohesiveness to be maintained only by silencing dissent?²⁸⁷

I agree with Eby’s conclusion that Wharton ‘speaks out against New York silence’,²⁸⁸ even as across the texts considered in this thesis there is ample evidence of her admiration for other kinds of silence – and of a multifaceted attitude towards silence that varies depending on context. Wharton’s awareness of, and responses to, the salient, social role of silence, makes her writing amenable to the kind of theoretical analysis proposed here.

Thomas Bruneau used the term ‘psychological silence’ to describe silences that are ‘very short, illustrated by hesitation in a conversation, or by a deliberate slowing down in order to aid the addressee to understand what has just been said. Other instances include self-corrections and stuttering’.²⁸⁹ These examples of silence are produced for reasons of psychology connected to character, and thus possibly correspond better with my category of Wharton’s ‘literary silences’. Instead, I would like to use the term ‘psychological silence’ to express how psychologists and psychoanalysts in particular interpret silences. Classical psychoanalytical understandings of silence view them as defense mechanisms or opposition, empty spaces that disturb the dialogue between analyst and patient. There is an alternative reading of silence as part of both language and the therapeutic process that reflects the historical philosophical views on silence outlined earlier.²⁹⁰ Gale and Sanchez dwell on the concept of silent thinking. They noted in particular the silent thinking out of problems. Certain thoughts may be impossible to express through words, and indeed thinking can occur without speaking, but all thought takes the form of language, even if it occurs instantaneously and the thinker is unaware of the involvement of the latter. On the other hand, a thinker aware of the role of language may write things down as part of their thinking process, or say things silently to themselves.²⁹¹ As well as recognising the connection between silent thought and language, and drawing on Martin Heidegger’s writing in *Being and Time* (1927), Gale and Sanchez, like Brox, viewed keeping silent as a component of discursive speech, or the ‘exchange of hearing and listening as well as talking’.²⁹² Silence is not merely the termination of speech; it is integral to communication. Heidegger’s ‘being-

²⁸⁷ Eby, pp.93-4.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., p.104.

²⁸⁹ Kurzon, p.1673.

²⁹⁰ Gale and Sanchez, pp.206, 209.

²⁹¹ Ibid., p.212.

²⁹² Ibid.

with' another depends on the silent element in discourse that signals listening to, hearing and understanding what the other person is saying. Silence then is not just a part of language, but language itself cannot exist without silence.²⁹³ In this regard Brox noted the following:

Even in everyday conversation, the qualities of their [speech and silence's] interrelation are as nuanced as the *media distinctio* in the [religious] chant. The silence in which a speaker pauses to think, to choose the right word. The silence in which another listens as a sign of respect, that allows time to comprehend the weight and meaning of what is said, that affirms the import of language itself. Also: the silence to which a speaker turns an attentive ear after her last word rises.²⁹⁴

Heidegger also drew a distinction between discourse and chatter, which Gale and Sanchez developed into their concepts of full and empty speech. Authenticity, 'being genuinely oneself', involves full, rather than empty speech, discourse rather than chatter – a dichotomy that occurs in Wharton's fictional and non-fictional writing – and even then it may be no more than a best attempt in a person's search for understanding.²⁹⁵ The critical point of Heidegger's and Gale and Sanchez's reasoning, however, is that authenticity also requires a degree of withholding that is absent from empty speech or chatter; it requires silence to allow for hearing oneself or self-listening.²⁹⁶ The value of gardens as spaces for developing a capacity for solitude, as prerequisite for self-listening within a therapeutic context, stands out primarily because Wharton comments explicitly on the pleasure that she derives from being alone in her gardens. Finally and notably, silence and solitude also have the potential to reaffirm a person's sense of individuality away from 'the crowded, frightening and impersonal context of group discourse' in a therapeutic context, and perhaps the world in general.²⁹⁷ This idea holds particular pertinence for Wharton whose literary prominence and tremendous activity fueled a need for and appreciation of periods of solitude and silence. It also chimes with her interest in monastic and religious cultures of silence. If essential to thinking, discursive speech, self-listening and individuality, I would go one step further to argue that silence is of equal importance to inter-personal relationships, which suffer when the individuals involved are unable to think or reflect, struggle to communicate authentically and to self-listen, or lack a sense of self.

The final category of silences that I consider may be labeled as environmental silences, although 'silence' is perhaps not quite the right word. A setting, rural or urban, outdoors or indoors, may indeed be completely quiet, but the existence of an absence of sound generally, and paradoxically, reaches our attention because of a concurrent occurrence of sound

²⁹³ Ibid., p.213.

²⁹⁴ Brox, p.70.

²⁹⁵ Gale and Sanchez, p.213.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., p.214.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., p.215.

bracketing or interrupting it. John Cage wrote that ‘there is always something to see, something to hear. In fact, try as we may to make a silence, we cannot’.²⁹⁸ He instructed as follows: ‘There is no such thing as silence. Get thee to an anechoic chamber and hear there thy nervous system in operation and hear there thy blood in circulation’.²⁹⁹ Equally important, Cage stated in his ‘Lecture on Nothing’ that ‘[w]hat we require is silence; but what silence requires is that I go on talking. [...] But now there are silences and the words make, help make the silences’.³⁰⁰ Crucial here is the observed connection between sound and silence; existence of the one relies on that of the other. This idea seems particularly relevant to environmental silence that could be accentuated through the sound of natural phenomena, such as insects buzzing, birdsong, wind, the movement of trees or sand, and so forth. Human or artificial noise too would emphasise surrounding stillness and, in turn, themselves be emphasised. Environmental silence in a text may be indicated to the reader by a narrator’s statement of the fact in the same way that a narrator may note explicitly a character’s silence. However, perhaps the absence of sound is made most obvious by description of that which is not, such as a faint rustle of leaves or a loud, reverberating shot.

IV. METHODOLOGY, TEXTS AND ORGANISATION

1. Methodology

This thesis includes a number of research strands. I rely frequently on my own analysis, including close reading, of Wharton’s primary texts, focusing on the themes of secrets and silence as they relate to her treatment of women. I draw on autobiographical and biographical information, literary criticism – a substantial portion of which is recent or current Wharton scholarship – and aspects of book history relating variously to the genesis of Wharton’s texts, her exacting authorial interventions during the production of serialised and volume texts, and their reception history. Finally, archival research conducted on the Edith Wharton Collection at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, further bolsters the originality of the work.

2. Texts

2.1. *Texts read for their secrets*

I consider Wharton’s first literary triumph, ‘the novel that would make her career’ (*NG*, p.139). Urged by James to ‘DO NEW YORK!’ in 1902, Wharton wrote *The House of Mirth* (1905), one of a number of works that scrutinises the physical and social landscape of her youth.³⁰¹ There, according to Maureen Howard, Wharton acts as a ‘privileged guide [...] to

²⁹⁸ John Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings by John Cage* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), p.8.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.51

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p.109.

³⁰¹ Powers, p.34; Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth*, ed. by Elizabeth Ammons (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990).

the uninvited' to the subsection of American society of which she is a former member.³⁰² She characterised this as a novel of 'concealment and revelation', of social presumptions, of moral and emotional discoveries, and of the unknowable, a critical view that neatly summarises the appeal of reading it closely for female secrecy.³⁰³ In this text Wharton chronicles New York's social evolution at the turn of the century. The city's traditional society, including its older upper classes, is slowly transformed by newcomers.³⁰⁴ For Wharton this society, itself no more than a generation or two old, was a stilted, stifling place 'where the tepid sameness of the moral atmosphere resulted in a prolonged immaturity of mind', a society starving for '[b]eauty, passion, and danger'.³⁰⁵ The novel is an account of Lily Bart's descent down the social ladder as she pursues a leisured existence as a member of the old monied set, but fails to ensure future financial security in the form of a suitable husband, all the while secretly safeguarding the secret of another. Full disclosure of that secret is her only salvation, but that would necessarily bring about someone else's destruction.³⁰⁶ In a novel about social competition and sprinkled with Darwinian allusions, Lily's death is a moral indictment. In evolutionary terms she is the least adaptable, certainly not the fittest, member of society, but she is its noblest.³⁰⁷

The Custom of the Country (1913) introduces Undine Spragg, an unscrupulous young woman of endless ambition whose flamboyant, upward social trajectory is the opposite of Lily Bart's downward spiral.³⁰⁸ *The Custom of the Country* not only complements, but in a sense also completes and develops, *The House of Mirth*. Showalter even called Lily and Undine 'sisters under the skin'.³⁰⁹ It too deals largely with things that are hidden and divulged. Its main concern is with an outsider's attempt to break into a succession of closed societies by learning, adopting and/or discarding, its opaque customs. Indeed, Undine is a diligent, if not most discerning, student of the secrets that will allow her into New York society – and eventually, if only temporarily, French aristocracy.³¹⁰ She understands that her own secrets need to remain thus if she is to achieve her goals. Lee likened Wharton's vivacious Undine to a 'barbarian invader' and, tracing her ascent, *The Custom of the Country* itself is a coruscating exploration of ambition (EW, p.424). It is a critique of

³⁰² Maureen Howard, 'The Bachelor and the Baby: *The House of Mirth*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Edith Wharton*, ed. by Millicent Bell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp.137-56 (pp.137-8).

³⁰³ Ibid., p.137.

³⁰⁴ Knights, *Cambridge*, pp.57, 59.

³⁰⁵ Edith Wharton, 'A Little Girl's New York', *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, 176 (1938), 356-63 (p.357).

³⁰⁶ Cynthia Griffin Wolff, 'Lily Bart and the Beautiful Death', in Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth*, ed. by Elizabeth Ammons (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990), pp.320-39 (p.334).

³⁰⁷ Carol J. Singley, 'Introduction', in *Edith Wharton's The House of Mirth: A Casebook*, ed. by Carol J. Singley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp.3-25 (pp.10-1).

³⁰⁸ Edith Wharton, *The Custom of the Country*, ed. by Stephen Orgel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

³⁰⁹ Elaine Showalter, 'The Custom of the Country: Spragg and the Art of the Deal', in *The Cambridge Companion to Edith Wharton*, ed. by Millicent Bell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp.87-97 (p.96).

³¹⁰ Ibid., p.93.

American practices of commodification and preoccupation with money and status, and its unsympathetic yet triumphant heroine, who is more than willing to sweep aside its cherished principles and customs, reflects those values (*NG*, p.171).

I also selected two rural New England novels to contrast with the New York texts.

Wharton's novel *The Fruit of the Tree* (1907) explores issues as disparate as industrial reform, marital incompatibility, challenges to the New Woman, and euthanasia (*EW*, p.208).³¹¹ Echoing the opinion of earlier commentators like Bell, Lee found the issues in this novel difficult to reconcile, but concluded that its emphasis on the need for 'sympathy' manages to unite the different strands in the plot (*EW*, p.210).³¹² Tuttleton saw the danger of abstract idealism as its main rubric, while Jennie Kassanoff identified an emphasis on agency as its central issue.³¹³ Wharton's interest in 'the individual as an active agent of change' was noted by Virginia Ricard, as well as her recognition that such action occurs within a 'frame' or 'public space' that allows social evolution.³¹⁴ This is a novel that explores the effect of individual action in the absence of a supportive social frame. Indeed, Kerry Slatius described Justine Brent's liminality as a female nurse who assists the modern physician, yet also operates outside his sphere. This position allows her to experiment with euthanasia as a form of sympathy 'outside fixed moral rules'.³¹⁵ Bell suggested that the multiplicity of material, which has led to this diversity of critical interpretations, was partly a result of the paralysing success of *The House of Mirth*, and partly of Wharton's determination to write something other than an 'exposé of high life written by an insider'.³¹⁶ Lee went beyond this idea to propose that Wharton was, above all, fearful of her own potential paralysis in America in particular, and that she forged something that would show her to be more than a 'woman novelist', able to explore the 'deep structures of human behaviour and social arrangements' (*EW*, pp.207, 209). As Wharton challenged herself as a novelist, she challenged her heroine who administers a lethal dose of morphine to a patient. By investigating euthanasia, at the time vigorously debated yet widely practised, and then letting her heroine marry that patient's widower, Wharton again guided her readers through

³¹¹ Edith Wharton, *The Fruit of the Tree* (London: Macmillan, 1907); also see Mary Marchand, 'Death to Lady Bountiful: Women and Reform in Edith Wharton's *The Fruit of the Tree*', *Legacy: A Journal of American Women Writers*, 18 (2001), 65-78; Schubert McCarthy, p.110; Tessa Tavares, 'New Women, New Men, or What You Will in Edith Wharton's *The Fruit of the Tree*', *Edith Wharton Review*, 21 (2005), 1-15.

³¹² Millicent Bell, *Edith Wharton and Henry James: The Story of Their Friendship* (New York: G. Braziller, 1965), pp.253-4.

³¹³ Jennie Kassanoff, *Edith Wharton and the Politics of Race* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.61; James W. Tuttleton, 'Justine: Or the Perils of Abstract Idealism', in *The Cambridge Companion to Edith Wharton*, ed. by Millicent Bell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp.157-68 (p.162).

³¹⁴ Virginia Ricard, 'Edith Wharton's French Engagement', in *The New Edith Wharton Studies*, ed. by Jennifer Haytock and Laura Rattray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp.80-95 (p.91).

³¹⁵ Kerry Slatius, 'Medical Testing: Nursing, Sympathy, and Moral Code in Edith Wharton's *The Fruit of the Tree*', *Edith Wharton Review*, 33 (2017), 306-27 (p.307).

³¹⁶ Bell, *Edith Wharton and Henry James*, p.254.

a world of moral and ethical ambiguity with concealment woven into its very fabric, and she selected a young, professional woman as its principal agent.³¹⁷

A cursory glance may not reveal much similarity between *Summer*'s (1917) Charity Royall and Justine Brent, although the novels do overlap in some respects.³¹⁸ Uneducated and uncultivated, Charity is desperate to leave small and isolated North Dormer. Secrets permeate her personal narrative. Her parentage and social background, and the history of her adoption are shrouded in mystery and never fully resolved, while her present involves a secret love affair and a secret child. Wharton's exploration of these issues is facilitated by the novel's setting outside New York, which is one feature shared with *The Fruit of the Tree*. Another, more important one, is the centrality of the female body in both texts. Finally, a less obvious commonality between the novels is that both investigate the boundaries of what is perceived as civilised behaviour and the limits of socialisation. *Summer*'s narrative reveals that Charity was born into a community of outlaws set outside North Dormer while her marriage to her legal guardian, Lawyer Royall, has undeniable incestuous connotations.

In 1921 Wharton became the first woman to be awarded a Pulitzer Prize, but that it should have been for *The Age of Innocence* (1920), as best presenting 'the wholesome atmosphere of American life and the highest standard of American manners and manhood', undermines the achievement (*EW*, p.586).³¹⁹ The novel places a section of American life, manners and manhood under the microscope and finds an exclusive society permeated by silences, hypocrisy and concealment, one decidedly lacking in wholesomeness. Contemporary reviewers were quick to identify the cynicism in its title, its characters' 'absolute imprisonment' and 'artificial and false standards', and its inherent satire.³²⁰ *The Age of Innocence* amounts to another searing critique of American perspectives and values by a novelist who had already renounced America and been living in Europe for more than a decade. The focus is again Old New York, but Wharton looks back to the early 1870s when Ellen Olenska returns from Europe to escape her marriage and causes Newland Archer to review his pending nuptials to her cousin, May Welland. Wharton's aims with the novel and its interpretation by the Pulitzer's advisory board were remarkably at odds. While the narrative strategy of this novel privileges a male character's point of view to a greater extent than Wharton's other texts in this thesis, a number of its secrets involve female characters,

³¹⁷ For example, Rebecca Garden, 'Sympathy, Disability, and the Nurse: Female Power in Edith Wharton's *The Fruit of the Tree*', *Journal of Medical Humanities*, 31 (2010), 223-42 (p.240); Kassanoff, pp.73-4; Tuttleton, 'Justine', p.166.

³¹⁸ Edith Wharton, *Summer*, intro. by Elizabeth Ammons (New York: Penguin, 1993).

³¹⁹ Edith Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*, ed. by Candace Waid (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003).

³²⁰ Vernon L. Parrington, Jr., 'Our Literary Aristocrat', in Edith Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*, ed. by Candace Waid (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003), pp.393-5 (p.393); Katharine Perry, 'Were the Seventies Sinless?', in Edith Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*, ed. by Candace Waid (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003), pp.381-2 (p.381); Phelps, p.385.

Ellen and May. *The Age of Innocence* presents a further opportunity to compare Wharton's treatment of and perspective on female and male secrecy.

2.2. *Texts read for their silences*

In the chapter on silences, I explore the prominence and function of silences in Wharton's writings. These are divided into three categories, in part to trace Wharton's movements across 'geographies of gender', to use Rebecca Solnit's term that distinguishes between the public sphere where men speak, presumably with authority, and the domestic or private sphere to which women have been traditionally confined.³²¹ Solnit and Beard both have contended that aspects of this gendered geography endure to this day and Beard has noted that when not silenced, women 'still have a very high price to pay for being heard'.³²² How far is this true in Wharton's work? As I explore this question, my categories slowly shift the focus of the discussion from the private to the public sphere, and allow me to trace how Wharton employs silence in traditionally female, private contexts, but also as she crosses over into male, public contexts.

I focus first on the comparatively under-researched, pre-war novel, *The Reef* (1912), which portrays American expatriates Anna Leath and Sophy Viner, resident in France and enveloped in silences.³²³ I address the forms and roles of the latter, whether these silences are imposed or sought out, and how other characters react to them. I pay particular attention to silences in the novel that somehow relate to the narrative's central secret; Anna is engaged to a diplomat, George Darrow, who once had a brief, exploitative affair with young Sophy, now the governess to Anna's daughter, Effie, and engaged to her stepson, Owen Leath. That the two female protagonists in the novel represent different classes and generations offer the opportunity for fine-grained analysis of how silences are employed to characterise Anna and Sophy, and of silences as socially imposed. *The Reef* further allows analysis of rhetorical silences, and Wharton's use of silence as a form of expression within the narrative.

Then I turn to Wharton's writing during the Great War, primarily her eyewitness account of the French frontlines in *Fighting France: From Dunkerque to Belfort* (1915).³²⁴ Comprising a series of essays that originally appeared in *Scribner's Magazine*, this text invites a consideration of Wharton's position as a female writer reporting on that which remains primarily (though not exclusively) a male occupation, warfare, even if she herself is unlikely to have viewed her output as gendered. It also allows consideration of Wharton's

³²¹ Rebecca Solnit, *The Mother of All Questions* (London: Granta, 2017), pp.50-2.

³²² Beard, p.8.

³²³ Edith Wharton, *The Reef*, intro by. Louis Auchincloss (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

³²⁴ Edith Wharton, *Fighting France: From Dunkerque to Belfort* (London: Hesperus Press, 2010).

‘propagandist’ activities during the war, and the extent to which these articulate with national state, gendered, and class-related silences.

Finally, I explore the travelogue, *In Morocco* (1920), which recounts Wharton’s observations during an extraordinary journey through Morocco in 1917.³²⁵ *In Morocco* further offers the opportunity to consider her responses to the real-world experiences of women that existed alongside Wharton’s mission to champion French colonial control of Morocco under the administration of General Louis-Hubert Lyautey (1854-1934). I consider it concurrently as an example of propaganda, travel writing, and a feminist text.

Together the texts chosen for their uses of silence encourage closer examination of the interplay, so evident in her novels, between the fictional and non-fictional in Wharton’s broader body of work. Thus rather than employing genre as segregator, my approach is to consider the theme of silence across genres. I also seek out Wharton’s role as a witness to what she reveals, and explore the notion that her revelations carry weight because they are evidence-based.

3. Organisation of thesis

Chapter 1 has explained the research focus of this thesis on Wharton’s secrets and silences, particularly in relation to her ‘feminism’. It has also summarised key biographical and autobiographical details and set out my critical framework.

The bulk of research presented in this thesis breaks down into two long chapters that explore in turn Wharton’s uses of secrets and silences. I consider in Chapter 2 whether there is a relationship between the fact that so many of Wharton’s fictional secret owners or keepers are women, and the nature of secrets in her narratives; connections between the gender of the secret keeper and how, why and when information is withheld or disclosed; whether it makes a difference that Wharton was a woman who herself guarded secrets throughout her life; and finally whether there is a larger interpretative system in operation, consciously knitted into her body of work, but visible only to the reader who takes a broader view. Because of their shared genre, the chapter works comparatively across the five novels.

I explore in Chapter 3 if and how Wharton silences her female characters; and whether she thought that they should not speak, or may have muted their voices for other, more radical, reasons. I also investigate the nature of Wharton’s engagement with silences in her war and

³²⁵ Edith Wharton, *In Morocco* (London: Taurus Parke Paperbacks, 2004).

travel writing, and if and how she uses her own voice to say what may be unsayable. Due to the generic variety of texts read for their silences, Chapter 3 is longer than Chapter 2, and considers Wharton's primary texts consecutively rather than via an integrated discussion.

In a succinct final chapter, Chapter 4, I summarise the findings of this thesis. I address the potential for further study of Wharton's uses of secrets and of silences, especially as pertaining to the position of women, and draw attention to the bearing of Wharton's texts on twenty-first-century concerns, despite their historicity.

CHAPTER 2: SECRETS IN EDITH WHARTON'S NOVELS

In Part I of this chapter I focus on fictional secrets that predominantly belong to or involve female characters in Wharton's *The House of Mirth*, *The Fruit of the Tree*, *The Custom of the Country*, *Summer* and *The Age of Innocence* and that are integral to the plot of each novel. I also explore their textual secrets, those that exist beneath the tale's surface and reward a re-reader's meticulous attention to what the writer may be saying obliquely. In Part II, I recalibrate the discussion slightly to pause over Wharton's expectations of her audience and, in the process, to position the inclusion of secrets in her novels in terms of her literary aesthetic.

I. WOMEN'S SECRETS

1. Fictional secrets

It is possible to divide characters in Wharton's novels into three categories with regard to secrets: secret owners, sharers and keepers. Secret owners are individuals or collectives who behave in ways that are intentionally withheld from others. Secret sharers are those who gain knowledge of this behaviour and who, generally, have not participated in it themselves. Secret keepers are those who have knowledge of secret behaviour and who actively withhold it from others. Not all secret sharers are secret keepers; some secret sharers choose to betray their knowledge to others with the result that the latter become secret sharers too. These definitions privilege behaviours, but such actions are often psychologically motivated and always reliant on cognitive function. A particular behaviour may be kept secret out of a sense of shame, fear of rejection, or perhaps a delicious sense of private knowledge. The process of guarding it may require the forethought to destroy an evidence trail, imagination to invent a cover story, sufficient memory to recall, even under pressure, accurate details of both the truth and the cover story, and adeptness at changing a subject or deceiving someone in a face-to-face conversation. Finally, betrayal of a secret may be entirely unwitting, for example through a stammer or flushing cheek, yet indicative of stifled emotion.

The pathways by which characters become owners, sharers and keepers (or divulgers) of secrets are integral to Wharton's plots, while different stages within the life of a secret could be viewed as her narrative scaffolding. These stages, employed to structure the following discussion, include the initial revelation of a fictional secret to the reader and then, within the narrative, the active protection, discovery, exploitation and confession of a secret. As will be demonstrated, all stages are not a feature of every narrative, and are not always passed through consecutively.

1.1. Fictional secrets and the reader

The contemporary popularity of detective fiction strengthens the notion that Wharton used secrets to attract and keep her audience captivated. Laura Marcus described detective fiction as central to the nineteenth century, observing how novelists like Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850), Charles Dickens (1812-1870) and Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855) structured their narratives around the existence and disclosure of secrets, but also highlighting the period's tension between internalised crime and punishment and externalised forms of surveillance, detective police, judicial procedures and discipline.¹ By the latter part of the nineteenth century fictional detectives featured in Dickens' *Bleak House* (1853), Wilkie Collins' (1824-1889) *The Moonstone* (1868), Rider Haggard's (1856-1925) *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) and Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883), and by the turn of the century Arthur Conan Doyle's (1859-1930) gentleman detective, Sherlock Holmes, was well-established in his role and poised to continue thus for a further two decades.² Wharton does not present her readers with a conventional detective mystery, but she takes advantage of the reading public's appetite for 'figuring things out' by filling her fiction with fictional secrets.

A set of letters written by *The House of Mirth*'s Bertha Dorset to Lawrence Selden is evidence of a past love affair. This secret, owned by Bertha and Lawrence, is disclosed to the reader when Lily buys the letters from Mrs Haffen, a charwoman. Mrs Haffen has discovered their remains in Lawrence's apartment, meticulously refitted the torn fragments 'with strips of thin paper' (p.83), and believes Lily to be the one who has written them. When she attempts to blackmail Lily with the letters, the 'blood rushed to Lily's forehead. She understood now – Mrs Haffen supposed her to be the writer of the letters' (p.83). Instead of guilt, her quick blush expresses angry mortification at being thought immoral by the charwoman. Lily, however, manages to control her emotions. She has already recognised the 'large disjointed hand, with a flourish of masculinity' (p.82) as Bertha's, a member of her social circle, and wife of George Dorset. This scene, which occurs approximately midway through the fourth installment in *Scribner's Magazine*, and just over halfway into the first book of the novel (pp.80-3), performs a number of functions. It reveals one fictional secret to the reader, as well as to Lily, while her knowledge of the affair becomes a second secret in its own right. The existence of secret letters is revealed at the optimal moment for readers of both the serialised and volume-text novel to measure Lily's subsequent actions against the fact that she now, like Mrs Haffen, occupies the position of secret sharer. Divulge it any earlier and the importance of the secret may seem less, or readers of the novel

¹ Laura Marcus, 'Detection and Literary Fiction', in *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. by Martin Priestmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp.245-68 (p.246).

² Allan Hepburn, 'Detectives and Spies', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Twentieth-Century English Novel*, ed. by Robert L. Caserio (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp.210-22 (p.211).

in serialised form especially may have difficulty recalling its particulars. While Mrs Haffen exploits her position, and thus vividly demonstrates the power of the secret to the reader, Lily becomes its keeper. Her sober decision in this moment to conceal Bertha and Lawrence's love affair by obtaining the letters ensures that the power of the secret also passes to her. She herself is aware of that power, when she reflects with evident self-awareness that if she had destroyed the letters, 'she might have continued to hate [...] [Bertha]; but the fact that they remained in her possession had fed her resentment to satiety' (p.94). At the same time, her decision also determines and prefigures her self-sacrifice at the end of the narrative. It reminds the reader of Lily's centrality in the novel, already established by Wharton's emphasis on her point of view, and suggests Lily's loyal character, which is essential to her continued silence about the affair for the remainder of the novel. The position of the revelation in the novel also indicates the importance of the secret to the narrative strategy of the novel; Wharton is able to use it as part of the plot and Lily's character development for the bulk of the narrative.

Contemporary reviews called *The Custom of the Country*'s heroine 'an ideal monster', 'the most repellent heroine [...], yet so cleverly portrayed that she is always real'.³ Brutal in her designs to move up the social ladder, Undine uses anyone who might strengthen her cause: husbands, acquaintances, her son. Even her parents, who cultivated her desire for success, but who through what Singley called excessively permissive parenting also allowed her to grow up with 'parents in name only', are victims of her offensive.⁴ After three years of marriage, Ralph Marvell's love for Undine has 'died down to its embers' (p.136). No longer under any illusion, he dreads her 'small daily deceptions, evasions and subterfuges' (p.133), but still he yearns for her presence, smile and touch. Indeed, his 'life had come to be nothing but a long effort to win these mercies by one concession after another' (p.136); Ralph understands his predicament as involving a constant battle between disillusionment with and desire for his wife. Unlike the reader, Ralph and most of Old New York remain unaware of the fact that Undine had been married before, to Elmer Moffatt.

The earliest hint of this fictional secret occurs in the first chapter of the novel, when Mr Spragg mentions seeing Elmer to his wife (p.11). Mrs Spragg's reaction to the news is dramatic: she is struck by a 'wave of almost physical apprehension', her hands tremble, and her face becomes drawn, like a 'pricked balloon' (pp.11-2). She wonders whether Elmer might 'do anything' to their daughter, and Mr Spragg declares, 'furiously', that he would

³ Tuttleton, Lauer and Murray, pp.202, 204.

⁴ Carol J. Singley, 'Worst Parents Ever: Cultures of Childhood in *The Custom of the Country*', in *Edith Wharton's The Custom of the Country: A Reassessment*, ed. by Laura Rattray (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2010), pp.59-70 (p.61).

‘like to see him touch her – that’s all!’ (p.12). The stage has been set for the slow unfolding of Undine and Elmer’s secret history. The reader’s curiosity is piqued by what the Spraggs say and by what they are so clearly not saying. Thus Wharton hooks her audience, while making them responsible for interpreting her characters’ vehemence. What exactly happened between Undine and Elmer? Mr and Mrs Spragg are not only secret sharers, but also devoted keepers of their daughter’s secrets. Yet Mrs Spragg’s expressive body language and the fragments of information that they do disclose intimate an undefined threat to Undine (also see pp.80-1). Did Elmer make and break promises to her? Did he hurt Undine, physically or emotionally? Did she fall pregnant? This is not only an early opportunity for the reader to have a stab at interpreting a gap; it is also an instance of misdirection on Wharton’s part. The Spraggs are concerned for their daughter’s future prospects, rather than her safety, but they overestimate her vulnerability when she herself poses the principal danger in the novel, as Ralph’s suicide eventually demonstrates (p.297). When the nature of the threat that Elmer represents to Undine is revealed during their clandestine, Central Park meeting (pp.68-76), along with the secret of their youthful marriage, the reader is given access to exclusive information hidden from everyone but Mr and Mrs Spragg. However, a fast first reading of the Central Park scene could lead to misinterpretation. Undine and Elmer never once use the word ‘marriage’; that they were wedded is only ever insinuated in this scene, delaying the reader’s pleasure and/or disgust in confirming the secret. There is a reference to Undine being described as a ‘child-bride’ in a newspaper; she also explains that ‘out here in the East they don’t even like it if a girl’s been *engaged* before’ (pp.71-2), suggesting that she had been rather more than engaged. A sequential reader who is eager to turn the page may miss the breadcrumb trail that Wharton has left a more attentive first-time reader, and thus perhaps also the import of these cryptic references.

Through a combination of dialogue and third-person narration that emphasises emotions and physical movements, Undine and Elmer’s secret is laid out, but surprisingly little use is made of free indirect discourse. Undine’s consciousness is largely hidden, leading Stephanie Foote to observe that she has no secret self.⁵ Such a reading is moderated to an extent by the textual secret surrounding Undine that I consider later in this chapter. Still, Wharton paints an image of a woman who feels and reacts, rather than thinks. The impression that Undine is incapable of, or resists, introspection seems intentional on Wharton’s part and functions on two levels in her narrative. As a woman of action and of surprising practicality, who manages always to ‘hit the nail of expediency on the head’ (p.104), Undine is deliberately juxtaposed with her new fiancé, a man of thought and imagination, who sees words ‘flashing

⁵ Stephanie Foote, *The Parvenu’s Plot: Gender, Culture, and Class in the Age of Realism* (Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire, 2014), p.145.

like brilliant birds through the boughs overhead' (p.88) or, ironically, Undine's hand holding 'the magic wand of expression' (p.89). Instead of creating a harmonious balance, however, these differences prove to be irreconcilable, allowing Wharton to drive home her fundamental message regarding Old New York's inherent weakness against the onslaught of socio-economic transformation. Ralph, sensitive and thoughtful, yet a slave to bourgeois values, perishes, while Undine, monstrous, instinctive, and driven by her own nature, flourishes.⁶ Wharton seems to say that goodness, while admirable, is worthless if not combined with social agility and a sense of self-preservation.

Indulging the sequential reader's need to know what happens next, the narrative builds up to a full disclosure, but does so at an uneven pace. Early hints of a secret are quickly followed by a partial revelation, enticing the reader to follow Undine's progress and to trust that the satisfaction of knowing the whole story will follow, as it eventually does. A detailed retelling of their youthful courtship is finally provided shortly before Undine and Elmer re-marry. A reader of the serialised volume in *Scribner's Magazine* would have had to work hard at remembering seemingly trivial details that eventually turn out to be significant and in this case Wharton may have been catering knowingly for two rather different audiences, one consisting of readers, and another of re-readers. Serial readers presumably looked out for the final installment in order to discover whether Undine's marriage to de Chelles would last, while intensive readers possibly were more attuned to the fact that Undine and Elmer's history was yet to be disclosed fully. It was only in the very last installment of the novel that Wharton revealed that Undine 'had been drawn to Elmer Moffatt from the first – from the day when Ben Frusk, Indiana's brother, had brought him to a church picnic at Mulvey's Grove' (p.343). These are Undine's own thoughts. When her history with Elmer is revealed in full the reader gains insight into Undine's consciousness and the impression that this creates is one of childish, unsophisticated sincerity. Her own interest in advancement already well established, she recognised and responded to the same attribute in Elmer:

Undine's estimate of people had always been based on their apparent power of getting what they wanted [...]. Success was beauty and romance to her; yet it was at the moment when Elmer Moffatt's failure was most complete and flagrant that she suddenly felt the extent of his power [...]. Elmer Moffatt, a shiftless outcast [...] [gave] her in the very moment of his downfall, the sense of being able to succeed where she had failed (pp.347-8).

As Wharton gives her readers the whole story, she 'psychologises' her heroine whose only true love is entirely narcissistic in the sense that she responds most strongly and enduringly to a man who shares her desires and values, as well her cultural background. Elmer's kiss

⁶ Beverly Hume, 'The Fall of the House of Marvell: Wharton's Poesque Romantic in *The Custom of the Country*', *American Literary Realism*, 40 (2008), 137-53 (pp.144-5).

left her feeling ‘that no one had ever kissed her before...’ (p.348). The thought resembles that of an infatuated teenager, accentuating Undine’s stunted emotional development. It suggests that she had had a fair amount of kissing experience, but also reminds the reader of her humiliation in Mrs Fairford’s drawing room when she mistakenly stated, as Shafquat Towheed noted, that she had most recently read ‘When The Kissing Had to Stop’ – a title that may well belong to a lowbrow popular novel, and one that turns out to be unfamiliar to her hostess, but which in fact is a line from Robert Browning’s ‘A Toccata of Galuppi’s’ (pp.24-5).⁷ The week prior to Undine and Elmer’s elopement was a ‘big bright blur – the wildest vividest moment of her life’ and caused her to leave Apex along with her plans and promises behind to pursue ‘a bigger and brighter blur ahead’ (p.348). Undine’s memory of moving from one bright but otherwise undefined blur to another is charming, if naive. Tellingly, though, two characters who refuse to pay attention to imposed limitations take the ‘Limited’ to travel ‘into the sunset’ (p.348). The name of the train that temporarily carries Undine and Elmer away from the equally ironically named Apex is significant. Their marriage is soon discovered by her parents who, despite their otherwise noticeably inefficient parenting, demand and achieve its annulment, putting a stop to Undine and Elmer’s kissing. The Spraggs’ incensed reaction to the elopement supports the idea that Undine’s fiercely ambitious nature has been nurtured, that she is the product of her home environment, which in turn represents what Stephen Orgel described as the ‘new American world of capitalist enterprise’.⁸

In *The Fruit of the Tree* Justine Brent’s ‘mercy killing’ of Bessy Amherst, the deed that becomes the subject of Justine’s secret, is an action within the narrative. Reaction to Wharton’s treatment of the subject of euthanasia was divided and drew criticism from both the medical and legal professions. In fact, the success of the novel as a whole was diminished (NG, pp.173-4). Concerns over its contentious subject may be why performance of the novel’s precursor, the play *The Shadow of a Doubt* (~1901), was cancelled. This text – the only known extant and complete play by Wharton – similarly to *Fruit* includes the plotline of a nurse, Kate Tredennis who euthanises her best friend, Agnes, and then marries her husband, John Derwent.⁹ Tuttleton argued strongly against the notion that the novel endorses euthanasia, but there is no doubt that Wharton problematises the issue by making the reader witness Justine’s thoughts and behaviour in the days and hours leading up to and

⁷ Shafquat Towheed, ‘When the Reading had to Stop: Readers, Reading and the Circulation of Texts in *The Custom of the Country*’, in *Edith Wharton’s The Custom of the Country: A Reassessment*, ed. by Laura Rattray (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2010), pp.29-42.

⁸ Stephen Orgel, ‘Introduction’, in *Edith Wharton, The Custom of the Country*, ed. by Stephen Orgel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp.vii-xxiii (p.x).

⁹ Chinery and Rattray, ‘Discovering’, pp.92-3, 106.

during her administration of the fatal dose of morphine.¹⁰ Also, the euthanasia scene is placed in the second half of the novel, comparatively near its end (p.414), at which point Justine's professionalism and capacity for empathy – I use the latter term in its present-day sense, but Wharton employed the term 'sympathy' or 'sentimentalism' throughout – have been established, as has Bessy's character-defining physicality and inability to see beyond her own desires (*EW*, p.210). In this, the novel differs from the play where the euthanasia, like most of the plot's dramatic incidents, has already occurred, making it difficult to evaluate Kate's action until the truth is revealed that exonerates her beyond any doubt in the final act.¹¹

In the novel, Justine understands that for Bessy life without movement is no life at all: 'Thought would never set her blood flowing – motion, in her, could only take the form of the physical processes' (p.395). Bessy herself acknowledges that her 'need to fill every hour drove her to excesses of bodily exertion, since other forms of activity' are unknown to her (p.250). Noticeably also, cantering 'under the twilight sky, with a strong sea-breeze in her face' (p.250), and a 'wild gallop' to match the 'fevered rush of her thoughts', leaves her 'brain benumbed' (p.254). Here it is hard not to notice Bessy's self-awareness, even as she professes her need for physical activity. She breaks her back in a fall from her high-strung mare, Impulse, 'on a day of glaring frost, when no horse could keep his footing out of a walk' (p.364). The last view that Justine has of Bessy, shows her 'light flexible figure, every line swaying true to the beat of the horse's stride' (p.364), the sun glittering on the mare's chestnut flanks (p.365). This image of vivaciousness is replaced by that of a woman 'wrapped in a cloud of opiates', her eyes dull, and 'breathing out' the words, "I want to die" (p.405). Through free indirect discourse Wharton gives the reader access to Justine's reasoning. She weighs up how long it might take Bessy to die if she does not administer the required stimulants that keep her alive against the amount of time that she has alone with Bessy, only to conclude that there is 'too much life in Bessy – her youth [...] [is] fighting too hard for her!' (p.413). An hour passes and the beat of Bessy's heart is '[s]trong still – too strong!' (p.413). Then Bessy's humanity starts to ebb away and Justine perceives her moaning as 'no longer the utterance of human pain, but the monotonous whimper of an animal' (p.412). When the 'vague animal wailing' ceases, Bessy manages one word: "Justine!" (p.413). And that single word tells Justine that Bessy's active mind is still living, 'in its torture-house' (p.413). Her body is not only incapacitated, it is in pain and dying, yet her thoughts, the very things that drove her to 'excesses of bodily exertion', remain in the present and beseech and convince Justine to fill the syringe (p.414).

¹⁰ Tuttleton, 'Justine', p.163.

¹¹ Chinery and Rattray, 'Discovering', p.104.

Thus it seems that Wharton tries to construct the section of the narrative that deals primarily with euthanasia in a manner that justifies Justine's decision. This effect exists in tension with suggestions that her unusually large capacity for empathy fills her with suffering that displaces that of her patients; that it serves herself as caregiver, in addition to or perhaps even instead of, her patients; and that Bessy has a chance of survival, although that would involve paralysis, a tension that is exacerbated by Justine's intentional concealment of her deed.¹² Justine's action is never hidden from the reader, which creates a sense of complicity, understanding and possibly even admiration for Wharton's empathetic heroine. However, it also immediately and seamlessly transfigures into a fictional secret in a way that not only emphasises and energises the medical and legal complexity surrounding euthanasia, but that also compromises regard for Justine. She covers up her deed by lying outright to Dr Wyant: "What had you done?" "Nothing – there was no time [...]. It came suddenly. I was going to call —" (p.415). Moreover, the omniscient narration makes clear that she is comfortable in the lie, conscious that her body language will not unwittingly betray her secret: 'Her face was perfectly calm – she could feel that her lips no longer trembled. She was not in the least afraid of Wyant's scrutiny' (pp.415-6).

Ideas of female bodily vulnerability are knitted as tightly into *The Fruit of the Tree's* fictional secret, as they are into *Summer's*. The central fictional secret in the narrative is Charity Royall's love affair with the young architect visiting North Dormer, Lucius Harney. Unlike Justine's secret, which is narrated in chronological order, this one unfolds in fragmented fashion. Charity's infatuation with Lucius, the 'sacred treasure of her happiness' (p.40), is established from the start of the novel. Her powerful effect on him, 'the fact that in discovering her, he lost the thread of his remark' (p.8), sparks the initial attraction for Charity that translates into 'long June days' spent together (p.40). His easy acceptance of her background is what really seals it for Charity: 'Her happy blood bathed her to the forehead. He was praising her – and praising her because she came from the Mountain!' (p.42). An undated, but earlier holograph manuscript of the novel reveals Wharton's original composition of the phrase, 'happy blood': '~~The blood~~ Her happy blood bathed her to the roots of her hair'.¹³ Charity, like Justine, is aware of her body's involuntary language, but instead of wishing to check and control, she here acknowledges and embraces these reactions. Wharton's free indirect discourse foregrounds Charity's surprised delight at being cherished rather than derided for her origins, and stirred by not being read as tainted, her blood is 'happy', the personification stressing the ill-defined boundary between her sense of self and body.

¹² Garden, pp.229, 237-8.

¹³ *Summer* corrected holograph manuscript (incomplete). Series I, Box 12, Folder 353.

Chapter 8 of the novel, and its third installment in *McClure's Magazine*, end with a note from Lucius to Charity, asking her to meet him at Creston Pool (p.79). In the next chapter, though, Charity is preparing to spend the Fourth of July with Lucius in Nettleton (p.81). The reader is taxed to make sense of the information that Wharton provides. What has happened since Charity received Lucius' note? There are certainly suggestions of a growing intimacy between them. The reader is told that Lucius likes to see the 'reddish edges [of Charity's hair] ruffled about her forehead and breaking into little rings at the nape' (p.80), while Ally Hawes, helping Charity to trim a hat, makes a pointed reference to her sister Julia, who had an abortion (p.81): 'I always remember that awful time I went down with Julia – to that doctor's [...]. She came as near as anything to dying...' (pp.80-1). In this moment, Wharton invites her readers to interpret Charity's secret for themselves, opening up a space for multiple realities to co-exist. But then she retraces Charity's steps and reveals that Lucius has continued to record historical buildings in the North Dormer area for a fortnight; throughout this time Charity has been his guide and theirs little more than a 'happy comradeship' (p.83). The fourth installment concludes with a kiss between Charity and Lucius (p.109), but Wharton again makes a temporal leap forward in the next chapter, to the end of August (p.110), before revisiting the intervening weeks, trying her readers' patience and relying on their curiosity to discover all, especially if they had been anticipating the next serialised installment of the novel. There is something joyful about the novel's chronological interruptions, perhaps because they mirror the way in which a young woman like Charity might experience love as a bounding, wild thing that lifts her up and drags her down, pushes her forwards and pulls her backwards. Wharton depicts Charity's state of mind and body as follows:

all the rest of life had become a mere cloudy rim about the central glory of their passion. [...] she felt as she sometimes did after lying on the grass and staring up too long at the sky; her eyes were so full of light that everything about her was a blur (p.113).

The implication that Charity and Lucius now have become lovers is unmistakable and Wharton confirms this a few pages later. Lucius has set up camp in an old abandoned house, where he spends his days cooking on a spirit-lamp, swimming, walking and lying in the woods; and 'in the afternoon Charity came to him' (pp.116-7). Charity's secret affair with Lucius is exposed to the reader. In comparison, the revelation of her pregnancy progresses in a temporally linear fashion, possibly signaling the inevitability of such an outcome and another instance in the novel of thematic concerns matching the order in which information is shared with the reader. Wharton has already prepared the way for this conclusion to her heroine's romance, by referring to the fate of her double in the novel, Julia Hawes. Charity's pregnancy is, like her affair, never hidden from the reader. On the contrary, the signs are

meticulously laid out: 'A feeling of physical sickness rushed over her – and then deadly apprehension' (p.128); 'the walls of books began to spin around her, and the rosewood desk to rock under her elbows' (p.144); '[s]he was conscious that [...] [Lawyer Royall] was looking at her intently, as if there was something strange in her appearance' (p.145), and culminate in her visit to Dr. Merkle (pp.145-8). Dr. Merkle's successful business and various allusions in the novel to girls 'in trouble' (p.133) suggest that Wharton is not judging her heroine, but commenting on the prevalence of and hypocrisy surrounding unwanted pregnancies, and by extension on the gendered double standard of the day.

Ellen Olenska knows all about this double standard. She returns to New York to escape an abusive marriage, the details of which are obscure. This is established right at the start of *The Age of Innocence*, in the second chapter (p.11). The novel privileges the perspective of a naïve male character, Newland Archer, who is engaged to Ellen's cousin, May. This narrative strategy means that the reader, like everyone else, has no direct insight into Ellen's thoughts and motivations, and increases the air of secrecy that surrounds her past, especially in the absence of corroborative information about Ellen's life in Europe. It is known, though, that Ellen seeks a divorce from her husband through Newland's legal firm. Newland is persuaded to support Ellen by reading 'an exchange of [legal] letters, but also 'a short letter from the Count to his wife', that plunges him into an 'atmosphere in which he choked and spluttered' (p.60). This record of the breakdown of Ellen's marriage has like 'a great wave of compassion [...] swept away his [Newland's] indifference and impatience', leaving Ellen before him 'as an exposed and pitiful figure, to be saved at all costs from further wounding herself in her mad plunges against fate' (p.60). Wharton only reveals that the letter contains a threat to Ellen after a detailed account of Newland and Mr Letterblair's evening meal – Mr Letterblair, senior partner of Newland's legal firm, enjoys dining 'deliberately and deeply' – during the course of their after-dinner talk (pp.62-3). Whatever the threat may be, at this stage no more than 'a vague charge of an angry blackguard', it has captured Newland's imagination and stirred him into action, yet the narrative unfolds slowly and purposely (p.70). In this scene Wharton uses the discussion of a fictional secret to shed light on the disparate concerns of New York society that seems to rate the avoidance of scandal as highly as it does a good quality port (p.62). She also draws attention to the degree to which women and women's affairs are at the mercy of men and male priorities: first dinner, then divorce talk, never without a cigar.

The continuing secrecy surrounding Ellen's past is notable. The resistance to revelation continues, for example, when Newland discusses the matter with Ellen. She does not deny that she may have 'appearances' against her, 'has exposed herself by any unconventional

action to – to offensive insinuations’ (p.70). Newland suspects that ‘the charge in the letter was true, and that she hoped to marry the partner of her guilt’ (p.71), thus revealing the gist of the count’s letter, but the verity of the accusation is never established beyond a doubt. He convinces Ellen not to pursue a divorce (p.72), which may or may not suggest that there is truth in the accusation, and/or that she does not want to marry ‘the secretary’, and so the psychological intrigue continues. In practical terms a divorce obtained in an American court certainly would have exposed a woman and her family to scandal and censure. Attitudes towards divorce were conservative during Wharton’s childhood, the period that provides the setting for *The Age of Innocence*. As Newland notes, American ‘legislation favors divorce – [...] social customs do not’ (p.70). At first he believes that he knows Ellen’s secret, takes her silence for an admission, and is glad that ‘it was to him she had revealed her secret’ (p.74). He may be mistaken, though. Ellen insists that there is nothing in the count’s charges, nothing to fear from the letter (p.105). Even though the text includes hints, absolute certainty remains elusive. Wharton uses the undisclosed secret and her readers’ desire to discover whether the clues in the text have been interpreted correctly to maintain their attention.

Contemporary reviews often home in on the narrative’s halting pace and the obscurity surrounding Ellen’s character and past. The *Pacific Review* commented on the slow, ‘somewhat meagerly’ unwinding of the novel; the *Saturday Review* noted that Ellen returns to New York, ‘rather under a cloud’, and in her *Athenaeum* review of the novel, Katherine Mansfield (1888-1923) drew attention to Ellen’s strangeness.¹⁴ It is also telling that the first and second manuscript outlines for *The Age of Innocence* were quite specific about the count’s vices, which were to include gambling, drug-taking and general debauchery, and rumours of Ellen’s ‘fastness’.¹⁵ The second outline notes that he ‘[s]pends all her money, & [that the] marriage goes to smash’.¹⁶ It is hard to ignore some of the parallels with Teddy Wharton’s behaviour in the years preceding the couple’s divorce, behaviour that provoked the ‘deepest and tenderest sympathy in all the pain & horror & inconvenience’ from James in a letter to Wharton, dated Christmas Eve 1909: ‘I’ve been uncannily *haunted* in respect to your situation (that is on the side of Teddy’s absence, his condition & the conditions over there &c)’.¹⁷ Wharton consciously decided against providing particulars of the count’s deeds in her novel, perhaps because doing so would have cut too close to the bone, but also because of the allure of that which is unsaid. The mystery of the implicit secret – the secret that remains unknown to the reader – is particularly potent in narrative terms, creating and

¹⁴ Tuttleton, Lauer and Murray, pp.291-2, 294

¹⁵ Jennifer Rae Greeson, ‘Wharton’s Manuscript Outlines for *The Age of Innocence*: Three Versions’, in Edith Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*, ed. by Candace Waid (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003), pp.413-21 (pp.414-5).

¹⁶ Ibid., p.415.

¹⁷ Powers, p.132.

ensuring continued interest and tension. Appleton realised this, using the sensational ‘Was she Justified in Seeking a Divorce?’ as headline to their advertisement for the book.¹⁸ Justine’s mercy killing in *The Fruit of the Tree* and Charity’s love affair in *Summer*, on the other hand, are examples of explicit secrets and function quite differently. The reader continues with the text to see what happens to the secret and its owner, rather than to find out what it is. In *The Age of Innocence* Wharton denies her audience the satisfaction of ever knowing it all.

In contrast to this never-disclosed secret, the novel also includes a fictional secret that is not one at all: Newland and Ellen’s devotion to each other is indicated to the reader in numerous small but telling ways, as their relationship develops. For example, Newland takes to sending Ellen a box of yellow roses after visiting her, ‘each time without a card’ (pp.51, 75), defends her unconventional behaviour to his family (p.55), and becomes unreasonably upset when he realises that Julius Beaufort visits her (p.66). The relationship is equally evident to characters within the text. They are themselves insiders who discover the secret with their ‘silently observing eyes and patiently listening ears’ (pp.200-1). Among them is May Archer whose empathy for her husband, rather than knowledge of his love for Ellen, represents a final secret in the narrative. Intriguingly, this fictional secret does not behave entirely predictably either. It involves information that is truly hidden before it is shared with the reader and other characters, but it is simultaneously introduced as a secret, and disclosed in full, at the very end of the novel. In fact, it functions much like the twist in the tale conventionally associated with short stories. Newland and May’s son, Dallas, tells his father that May had been aware of what Newland had given up, that she ‘had guessed and pitied...’ (pp.213-4). The revelation catches Newland as well as the reader unawares, although there are subtle indications of hidden depths to May’s character in the text of which Newland fails to take adequate account.

This perhaps is Wharton’s way of rewarding her reader for gamely accepting the gaps and omissions relating to other secrets in the novel. If so, it seems telling that the owner of the secret, and the character who turns out to have the most power to surprise, is May. Her insight into and ‘feeling with’ her husband’s struggle undermines his view of her as vacantly serene, a ‘young marble athlete’ come to life (p.88). She discerns, manipulates, and then bears the truth about Newland despite the ‘hard bright blindness’ that he attributes to her (p.208). For Ammons, May is Wharton’s version of the stereotypical American Girl, whose ‘virginity, mentally and emotionally, cannot be touched’ and Ellen her opposite, but this

¹⁸ Hildegard Hoeller, ‘Innocence and Scandal in Edith Wharton’s Old New York’, in *Edith Wharton’s The Age of Innocence: New Centenary Essays*, ed. by Arielle Zibrak (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), pp.133-56 (p.136).

reading is too simplistic.¹⁹ May is less innocent than Ammons admitted. She, like Ellen, understands the constraints that society has placed around her, but unlike her cousin responds to them in an acceptable, shrewd manner. May is more than the victim of a patriarchal tyranny that enforces female secrecy; she is complicit in it. By protecting propriety, she and women like her are made to carry the weight of the social order, but this also guarantees them a measure of influence. When May keeps her knowledge of Newland's love for Ellen secret, she secures the life that she seeks.

1.2. Secrets protected

Fictional secrets are protected to a notable degree as part of *The House of Mirth*'s plot. In this regard the transaction between Lily and Mrs Haffen has two features to explore. First, Lily refrains from informing her blackmailer of the true identity of the letter writer when she pays to obtain the letters, and so protects her social sphere; second, Lily also acquires the correspondence to protect Lawrence. Lily processes the information presented by Mrs Haffen with reference to New York society. Bertha's friends have 'smiled and shrugged' over her 'long history', and there has been 'conjecture and innuendo' (p.82) about her behaviour. The letters, however, represent a 'volcanic nether side' with the potential to turn society's 'whisper to a shriek' (p.82). As a member of that society, Lily is familiar with its code. George Dorset 'should be the only judge of [...] [his wife's] conduct', and his approval or indifference would safeguard her (p.82). However, 'there could be no thought of condonation', considering his 'temper' (p.82). Moreover, Lily is aware of society's censure of 'those who have not known how to profit' from its protection and have 'betrayed its connivance'; 'the body social punishes the offender who is found out' (p.82). The narrator adopts the register of the social scientist, emphasising the analytical and detached side of Lily's response to what she has discovered. She understands that to render Mrs Haffen harmless, she needs to obtain the evidence of the secret. In this context, where actual evidence is critical, the letters are the physical manifestation of the secret. S/he who possesses the letters, possesses the power of the secret, as emphasised by Simmel and Calinescu, and of its binary, betrayal. When Lily buys the letters from the charwoman, that power transfers to her. By staying silent and not defending herself against the charwoman's implicit accusation, by not betraying Bertha to someone outside their immediate circle, Lily protects her own, flawed social sphere for allowing Bertha's transgressions. She also upholds its patriarchal principles, here symbolised by George Dorset's accepted authority over his wife. An interest in social class, and thus also self, drives her action, but the fact that she as a woman has taken possession of the letters, rather than, say, Lawrence or Simon

¹⁹ Ammons, 'Cool Diana', p.437.

Rosedale, makes a difference. The offending couple's fate is in the hands of an increasingly liminal member of Old New York society with much to gain, should she decide to use the letters. Despite the absence of an overtly feminist aspect to Lily's character, Wharton focuses on a woman's response to power, perhaps in an effort to appease hostile readers of fiction that questions patriarchal control over women.²⁰

Lily's acquisition of the letters protects Bertha as an individual, but this is an inadvertent result, as Wharton's free indirect discourse makes clear. Lily admits to herself that 'Bertha Dorset's letters were nothing to her'; as far as she is concerned 'they might go where the current of chance carried them!' (p.83). Lily's thoughts indicate that she is willing to hazard Bertha's reputation and establish that there is little solidarity between the two women. However, Lily understands that social condemnation of the illicit alliance would not be limited to Bertha and it is the potential implications for Bertha's accessory that guide Lily's actions. Notably, Lawrence's primary misstep is not his involvement with another man's wife. Indeed, Wharton would return in *The Age of Innocence* to the theme of young men's affairs that invest them 'with a becoming air of adventure', and the double standards that characterise them as no more than foolish risk takers, but the women involved as 'scrupulous and designing', even 'criminal' (p.61). In *The House of Mirth* Lawrence's real mistake is his carelessness over the letters, the evidence of the affair (p.83). Wharton's heroine does not question this attitude. Like most of Wharton's women, Lily appears to accept that young men will have affairs. Her power as secret keeper does not translate into an explicit attempt to change the *status quo*, but rather into remedial behaviour that limits damage within an existing system. Simmel argued that 'writing is opposed to all secrecy', that it 'possesses an objective existence which renounces all guarantees of remaining secret'.²¹ Yet he added that we 'react to indiscretion concerning *letters* as to something particularly ignoble' as a result of their perceived defenselessness.²² This notion heightens the impression of Lawrence's negligence. Lily's evaluation of the potential damage that might be caused by Bertha's letters demonstrates a keen awareness of Old New York's value system. This society is not secret in Simmel's use of the term. Outsiders may easily discern its existence as a group, along with its membership and concerns and activities.²³ Indeed, Mrs Haffen's extortion is enabled by her acquaintance with the members and apparent principles of the group in question. Yet, the group is also characterised by secrets best understood by insiders. One such secret is that the appearance of its members'

²⁰ See Linda Wagner-Martin, 'The House of Mirth: A Novel of Admonition', in *Edith Wharton's The House of Mirth: A Casebook*, ed. by Carol J. Singley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp.107-29 (p.111).

²¹ Simmel, *The Sociology*, p.352.

²² Ibid.

²³ See *ibid.*, pp.335-6.

unimpeachable morality and behaviour is more important than their actual unimpeachable morality and behaviour, as implied by the possible repercussions for Bertha and Lawrence. This is nowhere more evident than when Simon Rosedale, who is still climbing the social ladder, declines to marry Lily once she is tainted by scandalous rumours, unfounded as they may be. He does not 'believe the stories' about her, but 'they're there' (p.199). Simon already understands that 'the quickest way to queer yourself with the right people is to be seen with the wrong ones' (p.200), or that appearances are paramount.

Lily's true measure lies in a series of responses to the opportunity offered by her acquisition of the letters. She experiences disgust when Mrs Haffen first approaches her about them. '[A]ll her instinctive resistances, of taste, of training, of blind inherited scruples, rose against the other feeling' of triumph (p.82). When Carry Fisher suggests that she provides George Dorset with positive proof of his wife's infidelity, Lily asks with a revealing 'deep blush of displeasure' that they 'drop the subject' which is 'too odious' to her (p.187). Although her body gives her away, she refuses to admit verbally that she possesses evidence of an affair. George himself puts his case to her, but she remains fearful, 'of herself, and of the terrible force of temptation' (p.191). This temptation is not located only in her ownership of the material evidence of their secret, but in the near certainty that betraying Bertha and Lawrence would secure her own future. Her words, '[y]ou're mistaken; I know nothing; I saw nothing' are repeated, 'as if it were a charm'; 'I know nothing – absolutely nothing' (p.194). So doing, she casts herself as the unreliable narrator and erases confidence, perhaps forces George – even the reader? – to reconsider what he thinks he knows. Lily is an unlikely forerunner for Ford's unreliable narrator in *The Good Soldier* who constantly questions his own knowledge and understanding of the history that he chronicles, but this does seem like another instance of Whartonian impressionism, where secrets and secret knowledge undermine certainty. Lily continues to guard her silence even when Simon discloses his own knowledge of the affair and the letters. He asks Lily directly '[w]hy don't you use those letters of hers [Bertha's] you bought last year?' (p.201) before suggesting that she marries him once she has used them against Bertha, rather than disclose the secret to George himself. At first Lily is seduced by Simon's words, as if in a 'state of tranced subservience', but then she rejects them, Dowell-like, unequivocally: 'You are mistaken – quite mistaken – both in the facts and in what you infer from them' (p.203). Lily thus keeps the secret of Lawrence and Bertha's affair, as well as of her own possession of the letters, at her own cost. Her reactions to the well-meaning but self-serving suggestions of her acquaintances are consistent, and demonstrate time and again the 'unexplained scruples and resistances' that so increase her attractiveness for Simon (p.234). The final installment of the serialised volume opened with Lily's poignant return to Lawrence's apartment and

destruction of the letters. This scene parallels one in the first chapter of the novel, and brings the narrative full circle. Lily's spontaneous yet indiscreet visit to Lawrence then sets in motion a train of events that leads to blackmail. It is a sign of her decline that she does not now hesitate to make an unannounced evening visit to that same man in his apartment. Social recovery is only just still within her reach, but she is determined not to 'profit by a secret of his past' by using the letters (p.237) and thus has nothing to fear from compromising appearances. The destruction of the letters represents a pivotal point in the narrative that dictates the tragic outcome of the novel. By burning them, Lily intentionally releases the power to act on her own behalf.

The Custom of the Country's Undine also firmly resists divulging her secrets, sometimes with diverting effect. She meets Elmer in disguise, in an out-of-the-way location, to persuade him not to say anything about their marriage. She wears 'her plainest dress' and 'a closely patterned veil over her least vivid hat' (p.68), to ask him that 'nothing shall be known' (p.72). Despite the comical cloak-and-dagger approach and Mr Spragg's earlier, ominous remarks concerning Elmer, the secret does not dominate the plot or the narrative of the novel. The reader knows of its existence, and seeks full disclosure, but it never overshadows Undine's astonishing progress. The matter is not revisited once Undine is assured that Elmer will guard their secret and not interfere with her ambitions, indicating her high level of trust in him, based on familiarity. They do not, for example, greet formally; there is merely a 'Well – this is white of you, Undine', and an 'I said I'd come' (p.69). In this regard the plot complements the heroine's characterisation as forward (and upward) looking. Wharton's treatment of the secret in this novel, then, contrasts with that of *The House of Mirth*, a novel that considers the existing rather than any new social order. Secret keeping is as much part of that existing social order, as it is pervasive throughout the narrative that interrogates it. Bertha and Lawrence's secret is really only relegated to the past when Lily burns the letters and dies.

In *Summer*, Charity protects her secrets through varying degrees of circumspection. Reminiscent of Undine Spragg, another small-town girl who wished to escape the life she was born into, Charity lies outright in order to go to Nettleton with the young architect on the Fourth of July, hides her new hat and dress as she leaves the house, and meets him at an agreed spot (pp.81-2). Later she rents a bicycle to get to their regular meeting place. She keeps the bicycle hidden at the library and waits until Lawyer Royall leaves the house before flying down the Creston road to Lucius (pp.115, 117). She is not worried about neighbours suspecting her "of going with" a young man from the city' when she first starts to spend time with him, but an 'indefinable' fear makes her keep it from her guardian who might

interfere and make her 'pay for it' (p.40). The phrase is a colloquialism, but in using it Wharton reminds her reader of Lawyer Royall's earlier 'shameful thought' (pp.17-8, 75), and the incestuous connotations that would surround a physical relationship between Charity and himself. Charity knows, however, that 'what had happened on that hateful night would not happen again' (p.23). It seems more likely that she fears his spiteful censure of a relationship with Lucius. The terms in which Charity thinks about her secret, and about why she wishes to keep it, make it clear that there is no shame involved. Knowing every intimate detail about Lucius is a fact, 'which nobody about her guessed, or would have understood, that made her life something apart and inviolable, as if nothing had any power to hurt or disturb her as long as her secret was safe' (p.114). Her enjoyment in being with him is obvious, a pleasure bound up in the affair being clandestine. The house where they meet has a 'secret sweetness' (p.116); they are enclosed in a 'secret world' (p.119); 'her secret rapture might burst from her and flash its defiance at the world' (p.123). Charity's relationship with Lucius, 'the secret treasure of her happiness' (p.40), is an empowering secret of the kind that Jung associated with the process of individuation which, for the first time, distinguishes Charity from those around her in a self-affirming manner.

In *The Age of Innocence*, Ellen's secret is formally protected through Wharton's use of perspective, and also through silences that are achieved by characters who withhold or resist fine-grained knowledge, but there is no sign in the plot of overt concealment by secret keepers and sharers via deception. Ellen, for example, is not unwilling to disclose information about her past, but such confidences are discouraged. Her aunt Welland indicates to her that any 'unpleasant' truth is best left unspoken (p.50). Unavoidably, however, pretence and secrecy breed rumours. As *The Shadow of a Doubt*'s Lord Osterleigh remarks, '[w]hen a woman refuses to explain her situation to society, society is at liberty to infer what it pleases --- and it always infers the worst'.²⁴ In Ellen's case, reports of being kept 'practically a prisoner', of the count's young secretary who helped her escape, of a year spent in Lausanne with the secretary, and of the count's subsequent unwillingness to take her back (pp.26-7) soon circulate. Wharton never resolves the matter of Ellen's time in Lausanne. Complemented by Appleton's provocative advertising campaign, which reflected Wharton's original plan for the novel that promised rather more scandal than the final product delivers, it is woven into the mythology surrounding Ellen's past.²⁵

²⁴ Edith Wharton, 'The Shadow of a Doubt: A Play in Three Acts by Edith Wharton', intro. by Mary Chinery and Laura Rattray, *Edith Wharton Review*, 33 (2017), 115-57 (p.237).

²⁵ Hoeller, pp.136-7.

Wharton introduces Ellen at the opera, as the novel opens, and her past immediately becomes an object of scrutiny to audience members: “‘After all, [...] after all, just *what* happened?’” “‘Well – she left him [...]’” “‘He’s an awful brute, isn’t he?’” [...] “‘The very worst [...]’”; “[...] she bolted with his secretary” (p.11). The use of direct speech in this scene creates a sense of immediacy and urgency and establishes that the information exchanged is gossip. Phrases like ‘I’ll tell you the sort’, ‘I understand’, ‘I heard’ and ‘I believe’ are sprinkled throughout the dialogue. Interestingly, the speakers are all male, and their words are accompanied by both ‘general’ and ‘irreverent’ laughter. There is even some predictable speculation about Count Olenski’s sexual preferences: “‘when he wasn’t with women he was collecting china’” (p.11). *The Portrait of a Lady*’s (1881) Gilbert Osmond is similarly interested in collecting. While Peter Donohue contrasted Osmond’s serious, ‘manly’ collecting practices – that include the acquisition and curation of art objects, as well as the objectification of his wife and daughter – to Edward Rosier’s effeminate accumulation of *bibels*, Kristin Sanner highlighted the incestuous relationship between Osmond and Pansy.²⁶ Thus both James and Wharton follow in the footsteps of Victorian predecessors like Wilkie Collins when they imbue collecting by male characters with pejorative connotations.²⁷ By presenting Ellen’s past as a topic of speculation, Wharton paves the way for Newland’s legal advice to her. He dissuades her from pursuing divorce and allowing the details of her past to become public knowledge: “‘Think of the newspapers – their vileness!’” (p.71). Intriguingly, neither Mrs Welland nor Newland is familiar with all the details of Ellen’s secret and recommend reticence largely on the basis of it being a social convention.

Both Newland and Ellen are discreet about their growing relationship. He attempts to pre-empt censure by telling May about the flowers that he sends Ellen (p.52) and they agree to meet at the ‘Art Museum – in the Park’ that Newland correctly supposes will some day ‘be a great Museum’, to sit down to talk in a room ‘mouldered in unvisited loneliness’ (p.185). Wharton has already established the park itself as a space where meetings may take place away from prying eyes in *The Custom of the Country* and reminds readers of its remoteness from the physical centre of Old New York by placing Mrs Manson Mingott’s home ‘in an inaccessible wilderness’ near it (p.9). The ‘unvisited’ room where Ellen and Newland meet holds the Cesnola antiquities, a collection of ancient Cypriot artefacts excavated and donated to the Metropolitan by its first director, Luigi Palma di Cesnola, and characterised as ‘still

²⁶ Peter Donohue, ‘Collecting as Ethos and Technique in *The Portrait of a Lady*’, *Studies in American Fiction*, 25 (1997), 41-56 (pp.46-8); Kristin Sanner, “‘Wasn’t all history full of the destruction of precious things?’: Missing Mothers, Feminized Fathers, and the Purchase of Freedom in Henry James’s *The Portrait of a Lady*”, *The Henry James Review*, 26 (2005), 147-67 (pp.156-7).

²⁷ See Kirby-Jane Hallum, ‘Collecting Men: Masculinity and Cultural Capital in *The Woman in White*’, *Victorian Network*, 4 (2012), 27-47 (p.32).

hard to explain fully' in the museum's *Handbook of the Cesnola Collection of Antiquities from Cyprus* (1914).²⁸ Examining this collection, Ellen comments on the "'little things, that used to be necessary and important to forgotten people'", yet are now "'labeled: 'Use unknown'" (p.186). Kassanoff noted that the Cesnola collection's loss of meaning may reflect Wharton's interest in cultural extinction, especially following the Great War, but that the furor that raged over the authenticity of the collection during the 1880s suggests that even objects which may connect the passing of Old New York with that of ancient civilisations, should not be taken at face value. When Wharton wrote *The Age of Innocence* Old New York society had already nearly disappeared, along with the 'quaint' conventions that used to govern its far-from-innocent behaviour.²⁹ The Metropolitan Museum in Central Park only opened in 1880. It is possible that this historical incongruity plays intentionally on the ephemerality of social values and mores, although it could also be a reminder to the reader that the novel is 'a living image of the times', not 'a piece of archaeological pedantry', as Wharton told Rutger Jewett at Appleton when audiences criticised its historical accuracy.³⁰ As she revised and worried over historical details in the novel prior to its publication, she told Minnie Jones that she did not think 'accuracy of date in such matters is nearly as important as the rendering of atmosphere', adding that the 'unimaginative person who writes a letter to point out that so-and-so did not sing in New York till 1880 is of very little importance'.³¹

In any event, despite Ellen and Newland's discreet meetings, Old New York manages to discern that a bond exists between them and judges them accordingly. Near the end of the narrative Newland realises that those around them believe them to be 'lovers in the extreme sense peculiar to "foreign" vocabularies' (p.200). He understands that he has been the subject of observation for months, that conclusions have been drawn, and that 'by means as yet unknown to him, the separation between himself and the partner of his guilt' has been achieved (p.201). The irony is that Ellen and Newland are not lovers in the extreme sense. This is perhaps best described as an undisclosed fictional secret within a fictional open secret, which furthers the portrayal of a society that is characterised by withholding, by not saying what is meant.

1.3. *Secrets discovered*

The discovery of secrets is integral to *The House of Mirth*'s plot. Mrs Haffen discovers the letters and the secret of Bertha and Lawrence's affair when she cleans Lawrence's

²⁸ Kassanoff, p.154.

²⁹ Ibid., pp.154, 161.

³⁰ Hoeller, p.141.

³¹ Wharton to Jones, 14 January 1920. Series II, Box 28, Folder 844.

apartment. Lily learns about it when she is blackmailed by Mrs Haffen and, as the owner of the Benedick, Simon Rosedale incidentally comes across the secret of the affair as well as of Lily's knowledge and possession of the letters (p.201). This series of discoveries emphasises the importance of fictional secrets in the narrative. When Mrs Haffen and Lily learn the truth about Lawrence and Bertha, Lily's social position is still tenable, but by the time that Simon's knowledge of the affair and the letters becomes apparent, her circumstances are radically reduced. Revisiting the secret at this point foregrounds her altered circumstances and, should she disclose her knowledge, her potential social rehabilitation. The discovery of secrets also serves to crystallise the novel's theme. The small band of secret sharers is drawn from across the social spectrum to become a metaphor for the fragility and permeability of the society to which fine but vulnerable Lily belongs. Ambitious Simon represents the men of commerce who increasingly sought to join the ranks of New York's elite from the mid-nineteenth century.³² Knowing the secrets of this exclusive world increases his chances of gaining membership to it, while it ensures the survival of Mrs Haffen, one of the many whose labours underpin the leisured lives of others. In contrast, the discovery of secrets does not feature prominently as a plot device in *The Custom of the Country*, unless one considers the Spraggs' discovery of their daughter's elopement (p.293). When Ralph learns of Undine's previous marriage he immediately breaks down and disappears without altering any other character's trajectory. This uninterrupted flow of the narrative following Ralph's suicide matches the novel's theme of the ruthless progress of a new order.

The discovery of Justine's secret in *The Fruit of the Tree* is vital to the unwinding of the novel's plot, but the mechanism by which it is discovered is far less prosaic than incriminating letters in a wastepaper basket. It involves a combination of suspicion and conjecture and again indicates Wharton's interest in human psychology. Dr Wyant rightly suspects, but cannot know for certain, that Justine intentionally administered a lethal dose of morphine to Bessy, especially as she manages to lie to him outright and reasonably effectively. When he first arrives at Bessy's bedside shortly after her death he is 'like some angry animal balked of its prey', but eventually his expression changes from 'incredulous wrath to something softer' (pp.415-6). He sends Justine away and no more is said about the matter, but after her marriage to John, he repeatedly approaches her for financial support.³³ Justine, not immediately realising that she is being tested and 'anxious to help him', responds to Dr Wyant's first requests for financial support (p.460). He takes that as confirmation of his suspicion. The first unambiguous indication that he has discerned her

³² Maureen E. Montgomery, 'Leisured Lives', in *Edith Wharton in Context*, ed. by Laura Rattray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp.234-42 (pp.235-6).

³³ Bauer, p.129.

secret and that his request for help is in fact extortion, comes with his final written request for help: ‘I have never reminded you of what you owe me [...] I suppose you would rather have me remind you than apply to Mr. Amherst’ (p.462). Shortly after he comes to the house and tells John: “‘She gave an overdose to Mrs. Amherst’” (p.492), forcing Justine to admit the truth. The fact is that if Justine had cared less about helping others, had had a greater sense of self-preservation and resisted his requests right from the start, Dr Wyant’s unconfirmed suspicions would have been rendered harmless and her secret would have remained safe. Her empathy is her undoing in more ways than one.

In light of the connection between secrecy and empathy in *The Fruit of the Tree*, it is important to consider the matter of empathy more closely. In broad terms, literary empathy studies consider ‘both how writers represent emphatic experience and how they provoke, promote, or prevent it in readers’.³⁴ It is not surprising to see sympathy, the precursor of empathy, figure prominently in a novel about social reform. Meghan Hammond and Sue Kim commented on, for example, the concept’s role in Victorian social-problem novels and abolitionist literature, ‘genres that sought real-world results’.³⁵ The late nineteenth century saw the birth of the influential theory of *Einfühlung* among German aestheticians and psychologists that would in 1909 be translated as ‘empathy’ – ‘the grasp of the feelings and thoughts of others’ or ‘feeling with’ (instead of ‘feeling for’) – by the psychologist Edward Bradford Titchener.³⁶ Originally, though, *Einfühlung* referred to an ‘aesthetic theory that captured the spectator’s participatory and kinaesthetic engagement with objects of art’, or ‘human engagement with inanimate forms, one that transports and transplants the viewer into the object, imagining the dead form as living’.³⁷ Hammond argued that it was literary modernist narrative innovations that paved the way for the eventual conceptual split between sympathy and empathy.³⁸ At least three members of Wharton’s intellectual circle may be connected with the theory of *Einfühlung*: James, Bernard Berenson, and Vernon Lee, who presented a London lecture on the concept in 1895 and by 1913 used ‘empathy’ as its English-language equivalent. Lee also notably elaborated the concept to suggest that empathy formed part of imagination, as well as sympathy.³⁹ In contemporary culture, both empathy and sympathy have been conceived as dangerous in a political sense, due to their

³⁴ Meghan Marie Hammond and Sue J. Kim, ‘Introduction’, in *Rethinking Empathy Through Literature*, ed. by Meghan Marie Hammond and Sue J. Kim (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp.1-18 (p.1).

³⁵ Ibid., p.4.

³⁶ Ibid., pp.5, 7; Suzanne Keen, *Thomas Hardy’s Brains: Psychology, Neurology, and Hardy’s Imagination* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2014), p.172; Susan Lanzoni, ‘Empathy Aesthetics: Experimenting Between Psychology and Poetry’, in *Rethinking Empathy Through Literature*, ed. by Meghan Marie Hammond and Sue J. Kim (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp.34-46 (p.34).

³⁷ Keen, p.172; Lanzoni, p.34.

³⁸ Hammond and Kim, p.6.

³⁹ Keen, p.173.

appearance of being ethically good.⁴⁰ For example, someone's empathy with those who are vulnerable or marginalised gives them the appearance of goodness, but does their emotion translate into true understanding and actions for change and equality? Empathy potentially preserves the 'hierarchical structure of sympathy'; may 'constitute a liberal fantasy of knowing the Other' when true understanding of histories, oppression and violence is lacking; and control boundaries between binary concepts like in-group and out-group, citizen and non-citizen, and human and non-human.⁴¹ In short, empathy may be criticised for 'serving the interests of the empathizer rather than the empathized'.⁴²

This is the misgiving that Rebecca Garden expressed in connection with Justine's capacity for empathy, and there may be a broader pattern of questioning empathy in Wharton's novels.⁴³ Lily's empathy for Lawrence, for example, has tragic consequences, as does Ralph's for Undine, while Newland's empathy for Ellen almost destroys his relationship with May. In fact, the significance of empathy in *The Age of Innocence* may be quietly hinted at by Newland's precocious familiarity with Vernon Lee's *Euphion* (1884). Wharton's exploration of empathy does not appear to be explicitly gendered, but in her novels empathy denotes characters of unusual sensitivity in social contexts that fail to value such a trait, and characters that act unconventionally exactly when convention would be the more prudent path. In other words, while Wharton does not equate empathy with weakness, she introduces it as a problematic or potentially compromising characteristic. Empathy in literature, however, is more than one character feeling with another; it also allows readers access to a character's mind. Hammond noted that James increasingly experimented in this regard, but still he refused the reader access to Isabel Archer's most critical thoughts in *The Portrait of a Lady*.⁴⁴ Is Wharton herself not also questioning the extent to which one can or should know another mind? The fact that she especially restricts access to the consciousness of characters at whom empathy is directed in her novels – Undine, Bessy, Ellen – suggests that Wharton has doubts about the reach and suitability of unrestricted empathy, both as a process of feeling with someone else and the ability to enter someone else's consciousness.

Returning to the topic of fictional secrets, *Summer's* Lawyer Royall discovers not only Charity's friendship with Lucius, but also runs into the pair during the Fourth of July celebrations in Nettleton and eventually finds their meeting place. The inevitability of these discoveries reinforces the idea that *Summer's* heroine is ensnared by her circumstances.

⁴⁰ Hammond and Kim, p.9.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Amy Schuman, *Other People's Stories: Entitlement Claims and the Critique of Empathy* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), p.18.

⁴³ Garden, p.224.

⁴⁴ Hammond, pp.39-40.

Lawyer Royall's varying reactions on these occasions do, however, contextualise Charity's decision to marry him, despite the fact that his intentions are far from selfless. In a conversation about his attempt to separate his ward from Lucius, his behaviour and appearance reflect a peculiar blend of taunting anger and helplessness, but also of admiration for this young woman. '[A]gainst his swarthy pallor the deep lines in his face looked black' as he derides her: "'Didn't he [Lucius] have time to answer some of those questions last night? You was with him long enough!'" (p.72). On the other hand, her "'how I've always hated you'" is met by silence and resignation: "'I know [...]. But that ain't going to help us much now'" (p.72). His face grows 'quiet and almost gentle' (p.73) and he ponders 'with sunken head, his veined hands clasped about the arms of his chair' (p.74). Later he says to her "'Charity, you say you don't care; but you're the proudest girl I know'", and just before repeating an earlier marriage proposal, "'there's one thing as old as the hills and as plain as daylight; if he'd wanted you the right way he'd have said so'" (pp.74-5). Lawyer Royall is undeniably fallible, as his insulting outburst in Nettleton demonstrates (pp.98-9), but he is not short of understanding or devoid of kindness. He is prepared to use his professional skills to make Lucius marry Charity, even if that means losing her (p.76).

Turning up at the empty and derelict house, and acknowledging that she may do as she likes, he makes clear that he will be there to help when needed (p.133). They both admit to the inescapability of future trouble in an exchange that is strikingly calm and mature. His "'[s]eems to me the fact of your doing that [continuing to live under his roof] gives me some sort of right; the right to try and keep you out of trouble'" is met by her "'[b]etter wait till I'm in trouble'" (p.133). These moments of quiet composure, shared by the two of them only, outweigh his abusive comments when Lucius arrives (pp.134-5). Before he leaves them, Lawyer Royall says something extraordinary in the holograph manuscript of *Summer* that is absent from the final text: "'Every thing I've done in my life's been a failure,'" he broke out suddenly – "'& now I've made a failure of this too.'" ⁴⁵ In the words of the reviewer for The Literary Supplement of the *London Times* (1917), he and his ward

are remarkable beings indeed, a bitter girl and a tarnished old man; [...] he is a really rich piece of creation, a masterful *louche*, obscurely battered and defeated derelict of his world; he does not, one feels, get all the display he should have had. ⁴⁶

But the omission of Lawyer Royall's comment from the final text is an example of how Wharton also worked to focus attention and sympathy on Charity, rather than on him. Still, when it is just the two of them there is no doubting his sincerity. Charity never does escape North Dormer, but taking him as husband serves both their immediate purposes.

⁴⁵ *Summer* corrected holograph manuscript (incomplete). Series I, Box 12, Folder 362.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, Folder 363.

In *The Age of Innocence* the secret of Ellen's past only becomes fully discoverable (but remains undiscovered), a few chapters before the ending. As in *The House of Mirth*, evidence of a secret takes the concrete shape of written documentation, but remains speculative in this case. Mr Letterblair has made 'discreet enquiries' and based on those suggests that Ellen may have retaliated against the 'Count's transgressions' by some 'tit for tat' (p.198). The results of his enquiries come in the form of 'a folded paper', kept in a locked office drawer, and pushed across a table towards Newland (p.198). There is a difference between Mr Letterblair's paperwork and Count Olenski's letter, although both forms of evidence are biased against women in that they are transactions occurring between men and concerning male 'honour'. The former represents a presumably objective account with legal authority obtained by a man of the law, while a husband with a vested interest has written the latter. Newland pushes the document back towards Mr Letterblair, without 'an effort to glance at the paper' (p.198). One interpretation of this action is that, being entirely a product of his society, as suggested by Jennifer Greeson, Newland's consciousness represents Old New York who does not want to know.⁴⁷ A second interpretation is that Newland – who has married May, but engaged in an emotional affair with Ellen – as an individual resists the finality of knowing, of becoming a formal secret sharer. Due to Wharton's choice of narrative perspective, Ellen's past also remains hidden from the reader.

Wharton seems more intent on not telling in this than any other novel analysed here, and on drawing attention to the unknowability of the lives of others. The discovery of secrets appears to play a decreasing role in the plotlines of these texts, possibly signaling her shift towards an increasingly impressionistic technique that accentuates realistic limits of knowing and understanding by fictional characters and/or the reader. But there may also be thematic and biographical concerns in play in *The Age of Innocence*. Wharton could be keeping Ellen's secret because the novel is not about the individual, but about a particular social enclave. Or perhaps she does not see Ellen's past as being anyone else's business, and consequently affords her heroine the sort of privacy that she herself prized. The subtle movement of the paper across the table top resembles the ultimate battle of wits between gentlemen, a game of chess. Mr Letterblair's name itself is telling in this context, evoking the image of a battle of letters or words, 'blair' being Gaelic for 'battlefield', but ultimately it is Ellen, standing outside the fray, who triumphs with her secret intact.

⁴⁷ Greeson, p.419.

1.4. *Secrets exploited*

Instances of blackmail are not only part of the protection and discovery of secrets in Wharton's plots – Mrs Haffen blackmails Lily in *The House of Mirth* and Dr Wyant, Justine in *The Fruit of the Tree* – but explicit examples of secrets being exploited in her narratives. More subtle examples of both attempted and successful exploitation also occur. In *The House of Mirth* George Dorset's weakness eventually leads him back to Lily, the friend he failed so miserably, to ask for help (pp.190-1). He, like Carry Fisher (see p.187), suspects that Lily holds the key to extrication from his marriage, but neither of them mentions Bertha's infidelity nor the letters explicitly. This may be partly because Bertha's unfaithfulness is common knowledge, but the exact nature of the evidence that Lily holds is not. George and Carry are both members of a society that whispers about transgressions; they will not shriek about them without evidence, and frankness about Bertha's reported wrongdoings would amount to a shriek. George's imploring speech is filled with insinuation and uncertainty. He points out that Lily is the only one who has certain knowledge of Bertha's behaviour: "And besides – can't you see? – you're the only person [...] the only person who knows" (p.191). The implication is that Lily holds the key to George's freedom. His release from one woman depends on another; he thus attempts to manipulate Lily's knowledge of secret information to his own advantage. He promises confidentiality when he claims that "there wouldn't be a hint of publicity" and calls on the power of silence to protect the secret by adding that there would not be "a sound or a syllable to connect you [Lily] with the thing" (p.191). He hopes to say "I know this – and this – and this" – and the fight would drop, and the way be cleared, and the whole abominable business swept out of sight' (p.191). Glossing over the particulars of her involvement with the 'abominable business' may also pave the way for an advantageous alliance with Lily; 'revenge and rehabilitation' is hers for the taking (p.191). George, however, overlooks the potential repercussions of learning the secret. Astute businessman Simon Rosedale has no difficulty recognising this reality: "In a deal like that, nobody comes out with perfectly clean hands" (p.201). Everyone involved will be smeared by the truth, but as the wronged husband, George may be left with the heaviest burden. As an outsider, Simon draws attention to New York's old, compromised moral order, but he himself is not above manipulation. If Lily is willing to use the letters to restore her position in society through a 'private understanding' with Bertha, he will marry her (p.202).

Lily, however, has learnt to be cautious of male offers of help after misjudging Gus Trenor (pp.110-7). She refuses to yield, to wield the power of betrayal, and chooses simply to hold it still inside herself. Her refusal is a locus of interpretative multiplicity. It removes freedom from George's grasp. His nebulous 'this – and this – and this' indicates his lack of

knowledge and yearning for certainty. Knowing details of his wife's affairs, seeing her words on paper, would give him the language to extricate himself from his marriage. By denying him certainty, Lily ensures that his wife's affairs remain an impressionistic narrative, unstable and open to interpretation by both Wharton's fictional Old New York and her readers. Lily's refusal to wield the power of betrayal may also be viewed as a refusal to let Simon into Old New York society by becoming his trophy wife. Is she defending New York's traditional and patriarchal upper class against modern views on divorce, newcomers in general, and Jewishness – a growing concern at the close of the nineteenth century – in particular?⁴⁸ Such readings could be argued with conviction, but Lily's refusal to tell as a gendered action is most pertinent in this context. A vulnerable woman with dwindling prospects chooses to hold fast to her convictions. Whether these are patriarchal and prejudiced matters not to her; what matters to Lily is that she does not benefit from the past deeds of another person if it compromises his future.

In *The Custom of the Country* the power of betrayal is exercised, thoughtlessly and appallingly, and by a man. The fact of Undine and Elmer's marriage is not mentioned explicitly until the business meeting between Ralph and Elmer, after the breakdown of the Marvells' relationship. Wharton's notes for the final book of the novel stipulate that this is to be a '[b]ig scene. Ralph learns the truth'.⁴⁹ Elmer reveals the secret to Ralph to put him in his place because he had "taken a rather high tone" with him (p.292). The initial revelation is thus entirely reactive. Then, dropping back into his seat, he takes 'the pose of easy narrative' to tell the story in a 'half-humorous minor key' (pp.292-3). They had had a 'fast marriage', a loop that was 'unlooped' at her father's insistence when discovered after a fortnight (pp.292-3). Elmer's attitude towards marriage seems cavalier, but the timing of his disclosure within the narrative reinforces his loyalty to Undine. It is made when he knows that she is no longer concerned about Ralph's reaction to the information concerning her previous marriage and divorce. Moreover, his act of disclosure is a display of power over Ralph, an effort to bring him to heel, and may be seen as exploitative; he, like Mrs Haffen, uses a secret for his own ends and ultimately this unthinking disclosure of Undine's secret kills Ralph. Knowing that Undine 'had lied to him – lied to him from the first... there hadn't been a moment when she hadn't lied to him', compounded by his financial difficulties, causes Ralph to shoot himself (p.295). Undine's 'freshness' and 'malleability', her being 'at the age when the flexible soul offers itself to the first grasp', had made him want to save her (p.53). He was Perseus, swooping down on winged Pegasus, to save Andromeda from 'the

⁴⁸ Irene C. Goldman-Price, 'The "Perfect Jew" and *The House of Mirth*: A Study in Point of View', in *Edith Wharton's The House of Mirth: A Casebook*, ed. by Carol J. Singley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp.163-79 (p.168).

⁴⁹ *The Custom of the Country* holograph notes. Series I, Box 4, Folder 101.

devouring monster Society careering up to make a mouthful of her' (p.54), hence his devastation on discovering that his wife was anything but the innocent that he had imagined, that Elmer 'had had her in his arms...' (p.295). He already knows that Undine was never in any danger of being devoured by society, that it was rather the other way around, but her lie emphasises his own naivety. In a social sphere where female innocence and male experience are matrimonial prerequisites, Ralph's emasculation is complete once he discovers Undine's lie and, by extension, her sexual experience. What remains unspoken in the text, is that Ralph has two reasonable options: he may either share his shameful discovery with those around him and bear their knowing, or he may guard and carry the burden of the secret by himself. By committing suicide, he rejects both.

It is striking that *The House of Mirth's* Lily, who may reclaim her position in society if she breaks her silence and restores her reputation as an innocent woman, chooses not to while *The Custom of the Country's* Elmer may freely share information about his own former marriage without fear of personal repercussions. Wharton again makes a critical point about the differences between the expected behaviour of women and men, but also about their actual behaviour. Lily's resistance to using her knowledge reflects a measured character that sees beyond its own immediate desires; Elmer's instinctive exploitation of a secret suggests the opposite. This does not mean, however, that Wharton's female characters are never willing to profit from secrets. There is Mrs Haffen, who happily exploits a secret at the expense of another woman, and *The Age of Innocence's* May Archer, drawn from the opposite end of the social ladder. May uses information that her cousin and husband view as secret to persuade Ellen to return to Europe. She has cautioned Ellen subtly against continuing a relationship with her husband, indicating her awareness of the connection, but without saying the words: 'I knew you'd [Newland] been the one friend she could always count on; and I wanted her to know that you and I were the same – in all our feelings' (p.195). By emphasising Ellen's friendship with Newland, May indicates that Ellen has broken convention. Her remark, '[s]he understood my wishing to tell her this. I think she understands everything', suggests that May has knowingly and purposefully reminded Ellen of the bonds of loyalty between family and possibly between women (p.195). Her manipulation of the situation is confirmed when she shares news of her pregnancy with Newland, but lets slip that she had noted it to Ellen before it was certain, when they had 'a long talk one afternoon' (p.205). Through a protracted process of disclosure Wharton establishes a level of insight for May that Newland fails to grasp until their son Dallas tells him of her secret understanding of what he had given up. This failure reflects Newland's limited understanding of his wife who seems all 'whiteness, radiance, goodness' at his side (p.16), as well as an absorbing empathy for Ellen that supplants his sensitivity towards May.

As May exploits her knowledge of Newland and Ellen's relationship, Wharton uses the situation to cast doubt on the perceptiveness of her hero, who mourns a wife 'so lacking in imagination, so incapable of growth, that the world of her youth had fallen into pieces and rebuilt itself without her ever being conscious of the change' (p.208).

Wharton's treatment of gender in terms of exploited secrets does not break down into such neat categories as principled women and unprincipled men; her characters are drawn from an uneven socio-sexual landscape that resists simple categorisation. Her interest in and exploration of the handling of secrets across the social spectrum, and on both sides of the gender divide, is nuanced and case-specific, although women are portrayed more sympathetically on balance, possibly because manipulating a secret may be a way to secure an advantage in a world where women's choices are restricted. May unapologetically uses an apparent secret to her own advantage and is thus revealed as a surprisingly strong and warm character, while essentially the same effect is achieved by Lily's resistance to exploiting a secret for her own benefit. Finally, the limited means of a charwoman renders even Mrs Haffen's behaviour comprehensible.

1.5. *Secrets confessed (or not)*

The reactions to blackmail in Wharton's narratives foreground the matter of confession. In *The House of Mirth* Mrs Haffen's blackmail leads directly to the safeguarding of a secret, while in *The Fruit of the Tree* it leads to a confession. These are seminal moments in the plots of the two novels where each heroine makes a decision that from thereon directs the narrative: Lily refuses to relinquish the secret, while Justine admits the truth. Both decisions have a self-sacrificing element that simultaneously points to female strength and a society that demands self-denial of women who refuse to compromise their principles or refuse their "lower" instincts'.⁵⁰ Lily could save herself by confessing her tangible knowledge of Bertha and Lawrence's affair, but she does not and the fact that she carries the burden of knowledge throughout the narrative emphasises the cost of her decision. Justine confesses her hand in Bessy's death on professional and ethical grounds, and so relinquishes her personal happiness.

It is remarkable that *The House of Mirth*'s Bertha and Lawrence are unaware that Lily is privy to their secret and never request her to protect it, making her the most assiduous of secret keepers. She may at first be motivated to save Lawrence's reputation by some hope of marrying him. They have discussed the possibility of marriage, even if only lightheartedly:

⁵⁰ Jacquelyn Scott, 'The "lift of a broken wing": Darwinian Descent and Selection in Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* and *Summer*', *Edith Wharton Review*, 25 (2009), 1-9 (p.3).

“Do you want to marry me?” she asked. He broke into a laugh. “No I don’t want to – but perhaps I should if you did!” (p.58). But by the end of the novel when marriage to Lawrence is impossible, her actions are altruistic. Her resistance to disclosing their secret to her advantage is entirely voluntary and a result of ‘the love his love had kindled, the passion of her soul for his’ (p.241). Lawrence remains oblivious of Lily’s sacrifice, as his description of her by the fire shows: ‘he fancied that he saw her draw something from her dress and drop it in to the fire, but he hardly noticed the gesture at the time’ (p.241). Wai Chee Dimock called Lily’s destruction of her final asset ‘her most eloquent protest against the ethics of exchange’ as she ceases to consider profits and returns.⁵¹ It is more than that, though. It is an expression of devotion, despite knowing that the feeling is not returned, and Wharton’s commentary on the capacity for strength and resolution of women in the face of tragedy.

There is a second character in the novel who knows and keeps the secret of Lawrence and Bertha’s affair, notwithstanding his quest for social advancement: Simon Rosedale. When Lily refuses to use the letters as leverage against Bertha, Simon lets the matter rest. Here I see a fundamental decency and respect for Lily’s wishes at work, features that are consistently evident in Simon’s forthright, but compassionate dealings with her. Significantly, the two characters in the narrative with most to gain fail ‘to confess’ and take advantage of the secret. Their respective silences over the fictional secret in the novel create an inadvertent ‘alliance’ between the weak and the strong, old and new, insider and outsider. What makes it most conspicuous, though, is Simon’s Jewishness. By not using his knowledge of the secret, his behaviour subverts the ugly anti-Semitic stereotype of the greedy, vulgar Jew, while their parallel decisions not to confess present Lily and Simon as alike, further complicating readings of his characterisation.⁵²

In *The Fruit of the Tree*, professional and ethical considerations compel Justine’s confession. Once Dr Wyant breaks his silence to John she cannot deny the truth (p.493). However, if her judgement of Dr Wyant’s professional competence had not been called upon, it seems unlikely that the secret ever would have been told. She does not freely offer the information to her husband until she has no other choice and then her admission is primarily driven by her ethical obligations as a nurse. The same sequence of events occurs in *The Shadow of a Doubt*. This is telling in itself, strengthening the reading that Justine also administered the overdose of morphine to Bessy because she believes it the right thing to do. Tuttleton argued

⁵¹ Wai Chee Dimock, ‘Debasing Exchange: Edith Wharton’s *The House of Mirth*’, in *Edith Wharton’s The House of Mirth: A Casebook*, ed. by Carol J. Singley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp.63-84 (p.77).

⁵² Goldman-Price, ‘The “Perfect Jew”’; Meredith Goldsmith, ‘The Year of the Rose: Jewish Masculinity in *The House of Mirth*’, *Modern Fiction Studies*, 51 (2005), 374-92.

that, in order to justify Justine's decision to euthanise Bessy, critics have focused on John's reaction rather than on the deed itself: 'to salvage Justine as a blameless heroine, this view undertakes to transform Amherst into a typical sexist pig, who cannot tolerate moral autonomy in a woman'.⁵³ Tuttleton referred specifically to Ammons' argument that John's condemnation stems not from the action that Justine has taken, but from the fact that she has taken it autonomously, without reference to her husband (*EWA*, p.44). There is, though, an undeniable gender dimension to the novel's plot. Dr Wyant wants to keep Bessy alive despite her obvious agony, which Justine, a young female nurse, has the courage to stop. Moreover, Justine's confession is not ultimately driven by moral obligation and respect for the institution of marriage. It is driven by ethical considerations and respect for her profession. Wharton explores the impact of an independently minded, working woman's decisions on her professional conduct and on her marriage, but without merging the two in the mind of her heroine who self-identifies first as a nurse, then as a wife. This is made abundantly clear by Justine's active concealment of her secret. She destroys the evidence of Dr Wyant's blackmail by burning his letter, comparing the letter to a poisonous snake that she wants to 'exterminate' (p.465). The simile chimes with the biblical title of the novel, and prefigures Dr Wyant's role as saboteur of Justine and John's contented union. Justine's confession occurs very near the end of the novel, but fairly soon after the euthanasia scene so that the achievement and unraveling of her happiness occur in quick succession. This underlies the impact of her decision to act and to keep her action secret.

There is one more confession to pause over, representing a plot twist in *The Shadow of a Doubt* that is absent from *The Fruit of the Tree*. Kate, who admits in order to preserve the happiness of her friends Clodagh Nevil and Robert Mazaret to having a secret of which she is not ashamed, but that she 'would have given [...] [her] life to keep from John', presents Lord Osterleigh with indisputable evidence of her innocence when he threatens to go to the police with the knowledge of his daughter's euthanasia.⁵⁴ Kate produces a letter from Agnes, written shortly before she died, that reveals her extramarital affair with Basil Mount, as well as her request that Kate help her: '[...] I want -- want you -- to -- give me something - before John comes. Don't let him see me. If this pain gets worse I may go out of my head -- and say something --. For God's sake, save me from that!'.⁵⁵ By confessing to possessing and then by deploying such a powerful piece of evidence, Kate is able to save her own life. However, like other letters in Wharton's narratives, this one is destroyed by fire when it seems that it might restore John's confidence in his wife. Kate is not prepared to use it to secure the trust

⁵³ Tuttleton, 'Justine', p.163.

⁵⁴ Wharton, *The Shadow*, p.204.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.250.

of a man who requires proof to believe in her virtue. In a moment that foreshadows Lily's decisive action on the eve of her death, '[s]he turns quickly, hold[s] the paper over the lamp, and throws the flaming fragment into the grate, where it burns up in an instant'.⁵⁶ Her refusal 'to confess' to her husband at once expresses her hope that he will believe her and acceptance that he may not.

2. Textual secrets

2.1. Textual secrets as ludic challenges to re-readers

Fictional secrets, those built into a narrative to move a plot forward and capture the attention of sequential readers, are accompanied by textual secrets that reward re-readers in particular.

Calinescu says the following about re-reading for textual secrets:

I think that rereading for the secret – rereading for what a text conceals, holds away, means obliquely or allegorically, hints at but refuses to name, or names falsely, misleadingly, and tantalizingly – has its ultimate reward not in the discovery of a certain truth but in the quality of attention it achieves. [...] The major revelation produced by rereading for the secret is simply (but also mysteriously) the value of attention, of intense concentration, of focused ingenuity, of total absorption.⁵⁷

Textual secrets are most pleasurable to readers as they attempt to unravel them – as they are consumed by the process of Kermodean 'overreading'. Kermode noted wryly that 'most readers underread, and the authors in turn tend to encourage underreading because success depends upon it; there is public demand for narrative statements that can be agreed with, for problems rationally soluble', and that they tend to be 'suspicious of overreaders, usually members of a special academic class that has the time to pry into secrets'.⁵⁸ Both critics imply that the notion of a clear 'truth' awaiting at the end of the process is overly optimistic, giving further weight to Calinescu's suggestion that textual secrets are best described as ludic challenges. The following readings respond to textual secrets that exist in the novels studied in this chapter, and draw on the texts themselves, as well as on existing scholarship.

2.2. Lily Bart's gambling passion

The House of Mirth's Carry Fisher comments about Lily: 'That's Lily all over, you know: she works like a slave preparing the ground and sowing her seed; but the day she ought to be reaping the harvest she over-sleeps herself or goes off on a picnic' (pp.147-8). The harvest that Carry has in mind, is a husband. Ammons noted that at twenty-nine years old with no dowry but her beauty, and having already 'netted but then let drift away' proposals from a

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.256.

⁵⁷ Calinescu, *Rereading*, p.272.

⁵⁸ Kermode, 'Secrets', p.88.

number of suitable prospective partners, Lily needs to marry.⁵⁹ Possible alliances in the novel include Percy Gryce, George Dorset and Simon Rosedale, and there is also talk of ‘one or two good [but lost] chances’ when she came out, a young man called Dillworth (p.10), and even an Italian prince in Aix (p.147). As a member of the leisure class, Lily employs her considerable ‘social arts’ that include ‘charm, sex appeal, solicitude’ as part of her ‘work-schedule’.⁶⁰ However, as Carry points out, Lily never follows through on her preparatory work to secure her conquests. Ammons read this behaviour as an indication of Lily’s instinct to contravene social rules – her visit to Lawrence’s apartment at the start of the novel is an example of such a transgression – and of her ambition to be autonomous, yet her quest is impeded by the fact that she has been trained to find a husband and nothing else.⁶¹ More recent interpretations of Lily’s failure to clinch a marriage deal, first proposed by Joslin and pursued by critics like Johanna Wagner and H.J.E. Champion, read the novel’s heroine through the lens of queer scholarship and highlighted her frequent refusal of heteronormative behaviour.⁶²

There is, however, another aspect of Lily’s character at work in the novel, and this is her penchant for high-risk, addictive behaviour. When Lawrence invites Lily up to his apartment for the cup of tea that Lily is ‘dying for’ (p.6), she replies: ““Why not? It’s too tempting – I’ll take the risk”” (p.7). Critics like Meredith Goldsmith and Victoria Shinbrot have written about the roles and meanings of addictive habits and risk in *The House of Mirth*.⁶³ In the early twentieth century, Lily’s chloral use and overdose spoke to contemporary concerns over opiate dependence.⁶⁴ It remains the most jarring example of addictive behaviour portrayed in the novel because it causes the heroine’s death, but others include Lily’s consumption of luxurious beauty, of stimulants like caffeine (tea drinking) and tobacco (cigarette smoking), and her gambling (card playing). I propose that their recurring role in the narrative helps to explain Lily’s reluctance to settle down in the expected manner, even though the text never explicitly names addictive behaviour as influencing her decision making in this regard. As such, they represent a textual secret.

⁵⁹ Elizabeth Ammons, ‘Edith Wharton’s Hard-Working Lily: *The House of Mirth* and the Marriage Market’, in Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth*, ed. by Elizabeth Ammons (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990), pp.345-57 (p.348).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.349.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp.349-50.

⁶² H.J.E. Champion, ““Hold me, Gerty, hold me”: Lily Bart’s Queer Desire’, *Edith Wharton Review*, 35 (2019), 96-118; Katherine Joslin, ‘Is Lily Gay?’, in *Edith Wharton’s The House of Mirth*, ed. by Janet Beer, Pamela Knights and Elizabeth Nolan (London: Routledge, 2007), pp.96-105; Johanna M. Wagner, ‘The Conventional and the Queer: Lily Bart, An Unlivable Ideal’, *SubStance*, 45 (2016), 116-39.

⁶³ Meredith Goldsmith, ‘Cigarettes, Tea, Cards, and Chloral: Addictive Habits and Consumer Culture in *The House of Mirth*’, *American Literary Realism*, 43 (2011), 242-58; Victoria Shinbrot, ‘Risk and Subversion in Edith Wharton’s *The House of Mirth*’, *Orbis Litterarum*, 67 (2012), 39-60.

⁶⁴ Goldsmith, ‘Cigarettes’, p.254.

Lily's card playing demonstrates her awareness of the addictive danger of high-risk behaviour, as well as her inability to resist its call. She recalls refusing to play bridge because 'she was afraid of acquiring so expensive a taste' (p.23) and had seen others under the 'spell of the terrible god of chance' (p.24). However, she has taken it up in return for the hospitality of her hostesses, which sometimes includes 'dresses and trinkets' (p.24), as well as a bedroom with 'softly-shaded lights, her lace dressing-gown lying across the silken bedspread, her little embroidered slippers before the fire, a vase of carnations filling the air with perfume, and the last novels and magazines lying uncut on a table beside the reading-lamp' (p.23), 'pleasures she knows to be short-lived but which she longs to be able to stabilize', in Clair Hughes' words.⁶⁵ Thomas Dutoit's exploration of hospitality as a monetary arrangement in *The House of Mirth* suggested that Lily's role as a houseguest may be read as that of a debtor paying her creditors, and helps to explain why she has little choice but to perform the tasks they set her, including playing cards.⁶⁶ But as a houseguest Lily temporarily gains the artificial beauty – the hothouse environment – for which she thirsts, so that her addictions start to fuel one another.⁶⁷ As Lily foresaw, 'since she had played regularly the passion had grown on her' and she has succumbed to the 'increasing exhilaration of the game, [that] drove her to risk higher stakes at each fresh venture'; 'the gambling passion was upon her' (p.24). This last phrase makes clear that Lily has become addicted to playing cards for money.

Focusing on some of Wharton's language choices in the narrative brings the prominence of gambling as a risky behaviour into further focus. For example, the word 'card/s' occurs twenty-two times in relation to playing, 'risk' twenty-one times, 'luck' twenty times, 'gambling' thirteen times, 'tip/s' thirteen times and 'casino' nine times. When Lily accompanies the Dorsets on an ill-fated cruise to the Mediterranean, they repeatedly visit Monte Carlo, popular destination of American travelers, first drawn by the Riviera column in the *Herald's* Paris edition. The column was written by James Gordon Bennet, owner of the New York *Herald*, and sprinkled with prominent American names in order to attract his compatriots.⁶⁸ As Monte Carlo evolved into the leading destination on the French Riviera during the late nineteenth century, it was plagued by rumours of gambling-related suicides that made their way all the way to America.⁶⁹ Tellingly, then, the second book of the novel

⁶⁵ Clair Hughes, 'Consuming Clothes: Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*', *Fashion Theory*, 9 (2005), 383-406 (p.390).

⁶⁶ Thomas Dutoit, 'Symbolic or Monetary Exchange: Money, Hospitality and the Home in Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*', in *Tropismes* ed. by Jean-Jacques Lecercle (Nanterre: Paris X, 1999), pp.113-36 (pp.117-8).

⁶⁷ Julie Olin-Ammentorp, *Edith Wharton, Willa Cather, and the Place of Culture* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2019), pp.127-9.

⁶⁸ George W. Herald and Edward D. Radin, *The Big Wheel: Monte Carlo's Opulent Century* (New York: Morrow, 1963), pp.17-8.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.11-2.

that concludes with Lily's death, opens on the steps of the Monte Carlo Casino (p.143), and it is in Monte Carlo where Lily is ostracised from her social circle.

However, Lily's gambling is not restricted to card playing; her ambivalence over marriage may well be another example of this passion. As Shinbrot observed, she also 'speculates on marriage prospects (futures figuratively and literally)'.⁷⁰ Lily is keenly aware of what is incumbent upon her if she wishes to secure her future through marriage: "[...] I have to calculate and contrive, and retreat and advance, as if I were going through an intricate dance, where one misstep would throw me hopelessly out of time" (p.40). Yet on the morning that she is due to go to church with Percy Gryce, for example, her preparations in the form of a grey dress and borrowed prayer-book 'roused a smothered sense of resistance' in her and she goes walking with Lawrence instead (p.47). On 'a day for impulse and truancy' (p.47) she knowingly missteps and misses another chance to marry, exactly as Carry describes.

2.3. *The only time Undine Spragg cared*

Undine's meeting with Elmer in the park, where she convinces him to keep their marriage and divorce secret, also provides the key to a textual secret in *The Custom of the Country*. She agrees to introduce him to her social circle 'in a business way' once she is married (p.74), but her compliance is expressed by more than words. She 'submissively' throws back the veil so that he may see her face and consciously turns an instinctive frown into a smile to assure him that she is glad to see him too, "*really!*" (p.70). The child-like quality of her conversation and behaviour is almost endearing in this most challenging of Wharton heroines. Single-minded, self-centered Undine hesitatingly admits that she 'never felt toward [...] [Elmer] the way [her] father did', gives him her word that she never meant to act mean to him, and desperately explains her cold behaviour at the opera: "I – oh, Elmer! I didn't mean to; only, you see, I'm engaged" (p.71). Like a child who finds justification for bad behaviour, Undine claims to have been forced into a specific course of action by something else; perhaps she is not mistaken. She reminds Elmer that she was 'only a child' when she was engaged to someone called Millard (p.70) – the first mention of yet another engagement that places Undine's career of seeking advantageous marriage alliances into sharp focus. The observation about her being a child is confirmed by Elmer's reference to *The Apex Eagle* that headlined Undine as a 'child-bride' once word of their marriage got out, and emphasised when he himself addresses her as 'child': "Nonsense, child! [...] Undine – why I never saw you cry before" (p.73).

⁷⁰ Shinbrot, p.40.

Here Undine's body language betrays her, as it does on the previous page where '[s]he shrank back with a burning face', 'cast a helpless glance down the windings of the wooded glen in which they had halted', and 'nodded mutely' (p.72). Forsaken by her coolness, Undine tries to 'wring from Moffatt some definite pledge of safety' with 'entreating hands' and, again, a 'glowing face' (p.73). The tears seem as involuntary and sincere as her blushes, glances and gestures. In these moments Undine's body unwittingly betrays her interior consciousness and establishes that, contrary to Foote's claim, she does have an inner world or secret self.⁷¹ Perhaps Wharton knew that Darwin had described blushing as 'the most peculiar and the most human of all expressions', which cannot be caused by physical action upon the body, but is a mental reaction to sensations of shyness, shame and modesty.⁷² Undine's request to Elmer to keep their secret is stumbling. It is dotted by numerous pauses and omissions: "'Just to ask you – to beg you – not to say anything of this kind again – ever –'; 'No, no – you don't understand'; 'It doesn't matter... whether it was straight... or... not...'" (p.72). Wharton's punctuation emphasises Undine's vulnerability in this moment. It complements her descriptions of Undine's body language to persuade a reader that her character has some substance. Undine's uncertainty in dealing with Elmer may spring exclusively from her desire to secure an alliance with Ralph and so become an official member of New York society (*EW*, p.424; *NG*, p.284). This is exactly what she claims after all: "'it's my first chance – I can't lose it!'" (p.73). But a more nuanced reading is also possible and this involves a textual secret hidden inside a fictional secret, signaled by Undine's uncharacteristic behaviour around Elmer – inconsistent with her usual conduct – that cannot merely be explained by her desire to make a good marriage. For all her pretence at sophistication, Undine is still little more than the young woman who fell in love with and married Elmer and he, it seems, remains similarly affected by her. This is the textual secret surrounding the fictional one concerning their first, short-lived marriage.

The affection shared by Undine and Elmer is temporarily set aside by something else they have in common, a mercenary ambition for success, but it resurfaces later in Wharton's text. When Elmer comes to see the tapestries at Saint Désert he steps forward and takes Undine's hands as soon as he recognises her and she laughs and blushes in response (p.333). She supposes without embarrassment that he must be "'awfully rich'", to which he replies that he now owns "'pretty near the whole of Apex'" (p.335). Their unapologetic exchange about money shows the synchronicity between Undine and Elmer: 'Here was someone who spoke her language, who knew her meanings, who understood instinctively all the deep-seated wants for which her acquired vocabulary had no terms' (p.336). This is the textual secret

⁷¹ Foote, pp.144-5.

⁷² Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (London: John Murray, 1872), pp.310, 326.

hidden within the fictional secret of their earlier marriage – revealed only by their unguarded actions, thoughts and words – until the novel’s penultimate chapter when Undine makes her remarkable confession about their elopement: “‘It’s the only time I ever really cared – all through!’” (p.357).

Undine’s ‘I didn’t mean to’ in the park is a childish comment, but it is sincere. Likewise, her impulsive “‘I’m real glad of it – I mean I’m real glad you’ve had such a stroke of luck!’” rings true (p.71). The whole passage attests to a familiarity between individuals who used to be close. The full appellation, ‘Elmer Moffatt’, rather than just Elmer, or even Mr Moffatt (p.71), is one example of their intimacy, but the reader is also told that Elmer studies Undine ‘humorously’, and openly, and that he observes her altered figure and pale visage (p.70). Elmer’s remarks about Undine’s ‘folks’, such as wishing himself able to scare other people as he could her father, also indicate more than a passing acquaintance. Taken together this evidence suggests that Undine and Elmer have very few secrets from each other. Finally, while Undine is aware that Elmer would not be characterised as a gentleman (p.69), she ‘pressed close to him, forgetful of her new reserves and repugnances’, begging him to help her (p.73). Undine’s reserves and repugnancies are not natural; they are learned, newly acquired, like the vocabulary of de Chelles and his circle, and may be unlearned, as they subsequently are. Her ability to maintain a close bond with another human being, based on true understanding, suggests that this ‘ideal monster’ does have a vulnerable, relatable, side. In this sense the secret of their earnest devotion makes Undine and Elmer complicit, but has far greater implications for her than his characterisation.

Mr and Mrs Spragg’s involvement in the annulment of her first marriage suggests that the woman portrayed alongside Elmer represents the real Undine, stripped of the acquired behaviour that allows her to fit into her new social contexts and of the ambition that they have encouraged in their daughter. In this novel most social newcomers are characterised by their ‘lower’ instincts for business, influence and/or success while the old order, represented by Ralph, values ‘higher’ social instincts, to use Darwin’s language.⁷³ Undine’s natural instincts work in tandem with social restrictions that force her to pursue marriage as business transactions, although it is clear from the career of Indiana Frusk, daughter of an Apex plumber and Undine’s main competition and double in the novel, that her case is far from unique.⁷⁴ Indeed, a congratulatory letter from a regular *Scribner’s Magazine* reader confirms the realism of Wharton’s heroine. Sam’l J. Krepps from Oklahoma City wrote to Wharton that ‘Undine lived the second door from us for several years and when her husband [...] lost

⁷³ Tichi, pp.96-7.

⁷⁴ For example, Ammons, ‘Edith Wharton’s Hard-Working Lily’; Showalter, ‘Spragg’, p.90.

all his money [...] she pawned some of the diamonds he could ill afford to buy her [...] and she left him for California [...]. You see you could get the plot for a first-rate [sic] Western story right here in our little city'.⁷⁵ Indiana's parents 'somehow contrived' for their daughter to attend the same boarding school as Undine for one term (p.17), and subsequently the two girls compete over holidays (p.35), fiancés (p.79), divorces (p.170), and media coverage in journals (p.180). One of the reasons that Undine feels that she may be entirely honest with Elmer, is because they are members of the same 'community of instinct' (p.335). As a result, she shines brightest alongside him. She is also the notable exception to the rule; Wharton's other heroines considered in this chapter are the best versions of themselves by themselves, or among other women.

2.4. *Justine Brent, Bessy Amherst, and the limits of agency*

Focusing on the evolving title of *The Fruit of the Tree* sheds light on the apparently disparate themes of novel and is an important part of uncovering its textual secret. An early title for the novel was 'Atropos'; 'The Chariot of the Gods' was another (EW, pp.207-8). The goddess Atropos, oldest of the three Greek fates whose name means 'inflexible', cuts short a human being's thread of life.⁷⁶ Still within the realm of mythology, happiness in the novel, especially that of John and Justine, seems to tempt fate, or the gods referred to in the manuscript's other working title. Tragedy ensues when Helios, the Greek sun god, allows his son Phaeton to drive his chariot across the sky for a day. Phaeton, unable to control the horses, loses control of the chariot, which threatens to destroy the world. To restore order, *pater familias* and bringer of justice, Zeus, kills Phaeton.⁷⁷ The novel's published title also alludes to a Biblical myth of the knowledge of good and evil, or God's secret, acquired in the Garden of Eden (EW, p.208). The connecting thread in the novel's narrative arguably relates to the limitations and reach of human agency, and the conversation that exists between the latter and external circumstances.⁷⁸ References in the text to the gods' envy of happy mortals (p.456), the influence of the 'powers above' (p.509), the unwillingness of the gods to forgive mortals who love and suffer as they themselves do (p.532), and the lessons learnt by mortals who dare to touch the bolts of the gods (p.597) suggest that such agency is finite, but at the same time recurring mythical imagery in the text may be read as imbuing

⁷⁵ Krepps to Wharton, 18 May 1913. Series XI, Box 64, Folder 1790.

⁷⁶ Elizabeth Knowles, 'Atropos', in *The Oxford Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* <<https://www-oxfordreference-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780198609810.001.0001/acref-9780198609810-e-494?rskey=mZDBgM&result=1>> [accessed 17 February 2016].

⁷⁷ David Leeming, 'Phaeton', in *The Oxford Companion to World Mythology* <<https://www-oxfordreference-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780195156690.001.0001/acref-9780195156690-e-1258?rskey=UkvDGJ&result=1>> [accessed 16 February 2016]; David Leeming, 'Zeus', in *The Oxford Companion to World Mythology* <<https://www-oxfordreference-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780195156690.001.0001/acref-9780195156690-e-1740?rskey=V1vyuX&result=1>> [accessed 16 February 2016].

⁷⁸ Also see Kassanoff, p.61.

the weak with unexpected sway. Such unexpected agency, reached for and expressed by two women, is a prominent textual secret of the novel.

Bessy's loss of physical mobility following a riding accident is symbolic of all the stunted projects in the narrative: John's plans for social reform, his two marriages, and Dr Wyant's career. It is an expression of arrested agency. Bessy, however, retains her mental faculties following her accident and despite her 'little half-smothered spark of soul' (p.393) still wields a degree of influence expressed through her desire to die and ability to persuade Justine to help her do so. Bessy, whose characterisation prior to her paralysis emphasises her physicality, is able to draw on seemingly endless mental reserve to retain control over her fate. Benstock identified a similar focus on mental and emotional liberty in Wharton's 'Mrs. Manstey's View' (1891) and her later *Bunner Sisters* (1916).⁷⁹ Elderly and lonely, Mrs Manstey escapes her meager physical surroundings by concentrating on the beautiful and life affirming view from her window.⁸⁰ The power of the mind is equal to that of Phaeton, son of a god, who convinces his father to let him drive his horse-drawn chariot across the sky for a day and so doing nearly destroys the world. In *The Fruit of the Tree*, the world that is destroyed belongs to Justine who is Atropos. As her name indicates, Justine needs to make a judgement. She assesses her patient's situation and then cuts the thread of her life.

Another secret hidden within the imagery of the text is that Justine is also a spirit of the wood and air, a winged being, who is as joyful as she is vulnerable. To John, with 'her bright pallour relieved against the dusky autumn tints, Justine looked like a wood-spirit who had absorbed into herself the last golden juices of the year' (p.290), but he also sees her as having 'a kind of elfin immaturity, as of a flitting Ariel with untouched heart and sense' (p.431), or a 'dun thrush-like creature' (p.444). She sees in herself a 'bird-like trust in the morrow's fare' (p.213), and would like nothing better than to be a 'wander-bird' who may 'look down people's chimneys twice a year' (p.290). Indeed, had she been winged she would 'choose to be a house-swallow' who, having experienced its 'fill of wonders', would return to its 'house full of busy humdrum people' (p.291). There she might:

fly low to warn them of rain, and wheel up high to show them it was good haying weather, and know what was going on in every room in the house, and every house in the village; and all the while I would be hugging my wonderful big secret – the secret of snow-plains and burning deserts, and coral islands and buried cities (p.291).

Upon re-reading, the poignancy of this passage is hard to overlook. It foreshadows the responsibility involved in Justine's decision to help Bessy die. Both women's actions

⁷⁹ Benstock, 'Edith Wharton', pp.30-1.

⁸⁰ Edith Wharton, 'Mrs. Manstey's View', in *Wharton: Collected Stories 1891-1910*, ed. by Maureen Howard (New York: Library of America, 2001), pp.1-11 (pp.2-4).

establish that, when circumstances require, deeds of great strength and courage may be performed by those whose agency seems otherwise limited. Ultimately, though, fate triumphs over the novel's heroine. Justine's future is determined largely by developments beyond her control, the accidental discovery and misreading of 'proof' of Bessy's virtue, perhaps orchestrated by the gods offended by her happiness and suffering.

2.5. *Charity Royall's body, women's bodies*

A similar clash between individual agency and external forces marks Wharton's *Summer*. Written in 1917, during a period of temporary respite from her relief work during the Great War, the novelist's return to this theme in *Summer* is not surprising. A textual secret in this novel revolves around the female body, body language, bodily coverings, forbidden bodies, bodily desires and pleasures, maternal bodies and broken bodies: Wharton's emphasis on women's bodies gains increasing prominence throughout this narrative. As presented more fully in Chapter 3, the Great War was not an exclusively male experience, nor one that occurred in an exclusively male domain. The conflict involved woman combatants, doctors, nurses, ambulance drivers, reporters and sex and other relief workers serving under various national flags on various fronts.⁸¹ References to the work of Catholic nuns aside, Wharton's published accounts of the Western front at the start of the war introduce to her readers what is still largely a 'manscape', to borrow from Solnit again.⁸² Soon she would witness the effects of the conflict on civilian men, women and children, as well as on soldiers during her relief work, but she portrayed Whitman's 'red business' as conducted largely by men.⁸³ Ammons suggested that *Summer's* temporal and geographical contexts allowed Wharton to escape from the atrocities of war (*EWA*, p.130), but would she have been able to suppress fully all her first-hand experience of a conflict that had engaged her on both an intellectual and physical level since its outbreak? I argue that, despite the novel's setting, Wharton's search for a reprieve from the atrocities of war, and belief that she had found one, she still reacted to the conflict as she composed *Summer*.⁸⁴ In 1914 she described it as a 'hideous flood of savagery' (*LEW*, p.335). Her response was to raise funds, to organise refugee relief, to found hospitals and hostels, to create job opportunities for women, and to write about her experiences to advocate for American participation in the war (*EWA*, p.128).⁸⁵ The

⁸¹ Joanna Bourke, 'Gender Roles in Killing Zones', in *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, Vol. III, ed. by Jay Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp.153-77 (pp.161-2); Margaret R. Higonnet, 'At the Front' in *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, Vol. III, ed. by Jay Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp.121-52 (pp.123-4, 126-8).

⁸² Rebecca Solnit, *Whose Story is This? Old Conflicts, New Chapters* (London: Granta, 2019), p.140.

⁸³ Walt Whitman, 'Drum-taps: First O Songs for a Prelude', in *Leaves of Grass: The 'Death-Bed' Edition* (New York: The Modern Library, 1993), pp.349-52 (p.351).

⁸⁴ Julie Olin-Ammentorp, *Edith Wharton's Writings from the Great War* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004), p.59; Price, p.95.

⁸⁵ Julie Olin-Ammentorp, 'Wharton and World War I', in *Edith Wharton in Context*, ed. by Laura Rattray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp.293-301.

invasion and bombardment of French towns meant that more than three thousand refugees were in permanent care by 1916; reporting to her hostels' committees, Wharton described the plight of women and children, imprisoned, raped, insane with grief (*NG*, p.323). The ludic challenge here is to read beyond the novel as exploring female sexual awakening, and to recognise warfare being reimagined as a battle between contradicting social demands on women, sited around female bodies.

In the first chapter of the novel, Charity is crocheting cotton lace to trim her summer blouse, 'enviable transparencies' as modeled by Ally Hawes (p.7). Attention is also drawn to her 'sunburnt hat' (p.4), one that is tossed off as soon as she is away from prying eyes, lying in the grass (p.12). She is told to buy a 'Sunday bonnet that'll make all the other girls mad' (p.45) with the money paid for Lucius' use of Lawyer Royall's buggy and, as noted earlier, her preparations for the Nettleton outing involves the trimming of a white straw hat with a 'drooping brim and cherry-coloured lining that made her face glow like the inside of the shell on the parlour mantelpiece' (p.80), worn with a 'new white muslin dress' (p.82). The hat had 'a pink lining that ~~shed a~~ made her face ~~look~~ glow like the ~~heart~~ inside of a rose' in the holograph manuscript of the novel.⁸⁶ While the hat's red lining is more expressive of Charity's emotional state than the original pink, likening her glowing face to the soft hue of a shell's interior surface instead of the centre of a rose emphasises her innocence. The symbolic purity of the dress is also evident, but in Nettleton Lawyer Royall only notices her uncovered head and, referring to her as a 'bare-headed whore' (p.98), interprets it as a moral failure. He himself is surrounded by 'a band of disreputable girls' (p.99) that includes Julia Hawes, wearing a 'large hat with a long white feather' (p.94) that makes a mockery of social convention. Driven by a complex mixture of inappropriate desire, jealousy and grief over his own flaws as well as hers, his words will his ward to turn into her mother. Soon Charity herself will personify the tension between purity and appearances of purity that rules North Dormer when she takes part in the Old Home Week celebrations, wearing a white 'dress of China silk' and veil (pp.120-1).

Women's bodily coverings matter in this narrative. They symbolise social position, as is clear from Annabel Balch's recycled slippers (p.131), and speak to their wearer's perceived morality. Dr Merkle wears a 'rich black dress, with gold chains and charms hanging from her bosom' along with false hair, teeth and 'murderous smile', suggesting nothing wholesome (p.146). She is Nettleton's resident abortionist. The body of Charity's mother, a 'fallen' woman, lies on a mattress on the ground and her dress, or state of undress, is

⁸⁶ *Summer* corrected holograph manuscript (incomplete). Series I, Box 12, Folder 356.

emphasised. Her clothes are ‘disordered’, ‘a torn skirt’ and a ‘ragged stocking’. One of her legs is ‘drawn up’ under the skirt, leaving ‘the other bare to the knee: a swollen glistening leg’. She lies on her back, ‘her eyes staring unblinkingly at the candle that trembled’ (p.162). This pitiless description of a lifeless female body on a mattress plays unmistakably on Mary Hyatt’s profession, but equally contains elements that might depict a fallen soldier. Mary is ‘a fallen soldier’ in a civilian context whose individual agency never stood a chance against the realities of her world. The fate of Charity’s mother, envisaged as a ‘woman who was once young and slight, with quick motions of the blood like hers, [who] had carried her on her breast, and watched her sleeping’ (p.38), reinforces the sense of inevitability surrounding Charity’s own destiny, unplanned pregnancy and disappointed ambitions. When she lies down on the same mattress where ‘her dead mother’s body had lain’ (p.169), she hovers on the very precipice of being lost.

Charity’s hats and new dresses and see-through lace trimmings hide and hint at a body whose ‘every drop of blood’ responds to ‘all that was light and air, perfume and colour’, who is intimately aware of ‘dry mountain grass’ under the palms of its hands, of the wind in its hair and through its light blouse (p.12); a body that stretches, arms above head, ‘with the indolent gesture that was her way of expressing a profound well-being’ (p.40); a body whose ‘rough dark hair’ may be brushed back (pp.80, 109), whose head may be turned back for a kiss, whose neck curves (p.137). Wharton is meticulous in setting up the sensuous vitality and artlessness of her heroine’s body in order to critique its patriarchal appropriation. Jana Tigchelaar observed that the ‘exploration of the subordination of women in the paternalistic system of marriage’ is a central theme of the novel.⁸⁷ In this respect, rivals Lawyer Royall and Lucius unknowingly collaborate to subjugate Charity. Lucius avails himself of her body in a way that is not possible with Annabel Balch, ‘the kind of girl it would be natural for him [as an upper-class man] to marry’ (p.143), and when he throws her over for ‘the most privileged and educated member of an isolated lower-class community’, Lawyer Royall offers her a viable alternative.⁸⁸ That the man who is proposing marriage also may be her biological father, was in reality the main father figure in her life, and is her intellectual and social superior, is overshadowed by her pregnancy. In Charity’s world it is better to make a morally questionable, incestuous marriage than to have a child and no marriage.

Fate has offered Charity two options: abort her child or marry her father, and she will not abort her child. This is where her agency reveals itself. She cannot win against the world of

⁸⁷ Jana Tigchelaar, ‘Relationships, Gifts, and Economy in Edith Wharton’s *Summer*’, *Edith Wharton Review*, 28 (2012), 13-20 (p.13).

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.14.

men, but she avoids following the same paths as Mary Hyatt and Julia Hawes. She empathises with her mother's decision to give her away, wondering if she was 'so much to blame? [...] Anything, anything was better than to add another life to the nest of misery on the Mountain...' (pp.170-1), and she understands Julia's decision to have an abortion in light of the humiliations awaiting a North Dormer woman who has to marry: miserable marriages and insinuating questions, such as "'Who'd ever think the baby's only two?'" (p.152). Yet she feels an 'immense and unexpected quietude' when she leaves Dr Merkle's rooms and realises that she 'would never again know what it was to feel herself alone' (p.148). She has already made her decision to keep the child. Haytock argued that, so doing, Charity acknowledges the biological and emotional consequences of sex, denied by the patriarchal view of women as disposable sexual toys.⁸⁹ Charity's thinking about her baby, however, has a less robustly feminist, near-mystical quality. She equates the intangible memories of her relationship with Lucius with her maternal body: 'memories of her former journey [...] seemed to be ripening in her blood like sleeping grain' (p.148), and 'memories, and a thousand others' of her 'poor romance' 'hummed through her brain' until she felt Lucius next to her. They 'were hers; they had passed into her blood, and become part of her, they were building the child in her womb' (p.150). She is able to release Lucius in a physical sense because her memory has the metaphorical power to fashion a new life. The complexity of this reasoning, of her decision to keep their child a secret from its father, and of her marriage to Lawyer Royall, illustrates the psychological and physical demands made on women, and reinforces the idea that there are parallels between the female body and experience and those of the soldier.

2.6. *Ellen Olenska as a vision of what was missed*

If important textual secrets in *The Fruit of the Tree* and *Summer* are connected to agency or acting, the opposite is true of *The Age of Innocence*. Certain particularities of plot hint at a textual secret involving the near-fetishisation of self-denial in this novel. Newland thinks of Ellen as 'the composite vision of all that he had missed' (p.208), but there are a number of indications in the plot that Ellen and Newland prefer the idea of being together to the reality of being together. As shown by Newland's affair with a married woman, of the kind that 'most of the young men of his age had been through' (p.61), illicit alliances are not prohibited, either by his own or Old New York's moral compass. Even seemingly naïve May is aware of her fiancé's history with Mrs Rushworth: "'You mustn't think that a girl knows as little as her parents imagine'" (p.93), but there is an 'abysmal distinction between the women

⁸⁹ Jennifer Haytock, *Edith Wharton and the Conversations of Literary Modernism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p.53.

one loved and respected and those one enjoyed' (p.61). Newland's Mrs Rushworth falls in the latter category, while May and Ellen are perceived as women deserving of more respectful and restrained treatment, much like Lucius' Annabel Balch in *Summer*.

The value that Newland and Ellen both attach to self-denial is illustrated in filmic terms as Newland walks to fetch her, watching the setting sun from the summer house on her grandmother's Newport property. He plays a perverse game with himself: 'If she doesn't turn before that sail crosses the Lime Rock light I'll go back' (p.132). When he later confesses this to her, she reveals that she did not turn around on purpose, to get away from him (p.143). Ellen's inaccessibility to Newland is emphasised by the creation 'within himself [of] a kind of sanctuary in which she throned among his secret thoughts and longings', and that becomes 'the scene of his real life' (p.159). He needs her to be fixed in his imagination but beyond his actual reach, or 'throned', in order to both escape from and continue with the mundane everyday. In the moment when he finally asks her to come to him, it is with the understanding that he would then have to let her go: "'Well, then: come to me once,'" he said, his head turning suddenly at the thought of losing her' (p.188). He asks when he knows that consummating their affair will achieve a permanent separation, once Ellen has declared "'I can't stay here and lie to the people who've been good to me'" (p.187).

The sense that an imagined relationship with Ellen is Newland's reality, that his perfect, piercing inner life overrides his external world, is confirmed by his decision in Paris not to see her again. Sitting outside her apartment, his memory of Ellen is vivid:

among them a dark lady, pale and dark, who would look up quickly, half rise, and hold out a long thin hand with three rings on it.... He thought she would be sitting in a sofa-corner near the fire, with azaleas banked behind her on a table (p.217).

That memory of his past has accompanied his ever-changing present, allowing him multiple existences.⁹⁰ Indeed, his fear is that seeing her after a lifetime apart will erase his imagined reality: 'the fear lest that last show of reality should lose its edge kept him rooted to his seat' until he returns to his hotel 'in the thickening dusk' (p.217). Kassanoff suggested that Ellen retains her reality for Newland because he never sees her as an aged woman; she remains unknown and secret.⁹¹ Both characters 'miss out', in Adam Phillips' sense: there is 'always what will turn out to be the life we led, and the life that accompanied it, the parallel life (or

⁹⁰ See Haslam, *Fragmenting*, pp.212-4.

⁹¹ Kassanoff, p.158.

lives) that never actually happened, that we lived in our minds, the wished-for life'.⁹² Wharton imagines exactly this scenario for Newland who, true to the principles of psychoanalysis, invents 'an ideal object of desire' that will never frustrate him. Ellen 'becomes a refuge from realer exchanges with realer people'.⁹³ The deepest desires of both characters remain unmet in a tale of exquisite self-denial, required for his continued existence in the world around him, and by her experience of life outside that world's overtly accepted patterns of behaviour (p.175).

II. WHARTON'S READERS

1. 'To read is not a virtue; but to read well is an art'

Wharton entered into an unwritten contract with her many readers throughout her writing career. In its first three weeks, *The House of Mirth* sold 30,000 copies for Scribner's. This number rose to 140,000 in the novel's first year of publication. Some fifteen years later, *The Age of Innocence* would sell 115,000 copies in its first year.⁹⁴ A further indication of the size of Wharton's readership – both anticipated and realised – is that Macmillan repeatedly offered her their 'gold standard' royalty rate of 25% between 1907 and 1913, as discussed by Towheed.⁹⁵ Following *The House of Mirth*'s success, *Scribner's Magazine* paid Wharton \$10,000 to serialise her next novel, *The Fruit of the Tree*. Even during the Depression years, as Wharton's career neared its end, Jewett found that the promise of having their advertisements included in a story by Edith Wharton persuaded advertisers to pay magazines top rates.⁹⁶ In return for purchasing her novels or the magazines that serialised them, Wharton undertook to give her readers enjoyment, to challenge them, and perhaps also to protect them from the things they wished to avoid. Her masterly control over language, plot and characterisation, and her use of fictional and textual secrets enabled her to fulfill all these promises.

Textual secrets in particular are relevant to readerly gratification and protection. Then as now, some readers of 1917's *Summer* may have been intrigued by the subtle parallels between actual bloodshed on the European frontlines and battles fought over female bodies in a tucked-away corner of America. Candace Waid highlighted resonances between the rubble heaps in *Fighting France*, the ramshackle structures of Bear Mountain's outlaw

⁹² Adam Phillips, *Missing Out: In Praise of the Unlived Life* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), p.xii.

⁹³ Ibid., p.19.

⁹⁴ Gary Totten, 'Selling Wharton', in *Edith Wharton in Context*, ed. by Laura Rattray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp.127-36 (pp.130-1).

⁹⁵ Shafquat Towheed, 'Introduction', in *The Correspondence of Edith Wharton and Macmillan, 1901-1930*, ed. by Shafquat Towheed (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp.1-57 (p.24).

⁹⁶ Ibid., p.13; Totten, pp.131-2.

colony in *Summer*, and the body of the dead woman who is Charity's mother.⁹⁷ Julie Olin-Ammentorp, building on Nevius' suggestion that Wharton's portrayal of Mary Hyatt's body resembles that of 'the combat diary', had 'little doubt that the description of Charity's mother, a poor, rural, American woman, carries the horror of many of the deaths in World War I'.⁹⁸ It seems just as likely that many more readers may have preferred not to pause over these matters, but to focus on what happens next to Charity and her unborn child, on whether Lucius will return to marry her, and whether she will escape the unpleasantness of the Mountain and the tediousness of North Dormer.

Kermode said that 'to read a novel expecting the satisfaction of closure and the receipt of a message is what most people find enough to do' because this method 'resembles the one that works for ordinary acts of communication'.⁹⁹ This is an audience less likely to re-read (or more likely to 'underread'), recognise and reflect on *Summer*'s textual secrets. Thinking about serialised and volume texts, it would be a mistake to attempt a neat division between readers and serialised novels, and between re-readers and volume texts. An unquestionably discerning reader like James consumed Wharton's writing in both serialised and volume-text format, as he noted in connection with *The House of Mirth* in February and December 1905 respectively: 'I have read the February morsel of the House of Mirth, with such a sense of its compact fullness, vivid picture & "sustained interest" as make me really wish to celebrate the emotion', and 'I shall read the H of M again, over, in the "final" state'.¹⁰⁰ Was James representative of Wharton's ideal reader? It seems worth seeking clarification from the novelist herself.

Wharton distinguishes between what she calls born readers and mechanical ones in her 1903 essay, 'The Vice of Reading'. In *The Fruit of the Tree*, John has always been a reader, 'a slow absorber of its essence'. In contrast, Justine is a 'flame-like devourer of the page' (p.307). In her essay Wharton argues that the 'self-confessed devourer of foolish fiction' is harmless while reading 'the novel of the day'.¹⁰¹ The problem comes when the devourer 'strays from his [or her] predestined pastures', to the 'domain of letters' to discuss, criticise, condemn or even praise (VR, pp.514-5). Whether Justine devours more than foolish fiction or not, her portrayal as a reader is different from John's. Is this why she puts what turns out to be an unreasonable amount of stock into his annotation of Bacon, allowing the sentences penciled onto the fly-leaf – '[w]e perish because we follow other men's examples. Socrates

⁹⁷ Candace Waid, *Edith Wharton's Letters from the Underworld: Fictions of Women and Writing* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991) pp.81-2.

⁹⁸ Nevius, p.170; Olin-Ammentorp, *Edith Wharton's Writings*, pp.61-2.

⁹⁹ Kermode, 'Secrets', p.88.

¹⁰⁰ Powers, pp.47, 59.

¹⁰¹ Edith Wharton, 'The Vice of Reading', *The North American Review*, 177 (1903), 513-21 (p.514).

used to call the opinions of many by the name of Lamiæ – bugbears to frighten children’ – to influence her thinking around Bessy’s suffering and request to die (pp.410-1)? Wharton may be developing her thesis regarding the vices of a mechanical reader who attempts a text that does not ‘suit’ them, and/or she may be thinking about the relationships between texts and readers in a wider sense. Here I would like to pause over her views on different types of readers and the conversations between reader and text. Ignoring that reading is a learned practice, Wharton describes the reading of a born reader, the one with a natural gift, as a reflex action, as something as normal as breathing (VR, pp.513, 515). Critically, such reading represents ‘an *interchange* of thought between writer and reader’. It is no good if a ‘book enters the reader’s mind just as it left the writer’s’; in such a case ‘it has been read to no purpose’. Purposeful reading requires ‘additions and modifications’ by the mind of the reader; in short, it requires creative collaboration between writer and reader (VR, pp.513-4). This sketch should not only resonate with the impressionist writer who wishes to engage and challenge readers and happily shares responsibility for interpretation and meaning(s) found within a text, but also sounds like someone who practises Calinescu’s reflective re-reading. Wharton admits that certain texts lend themselves better to modification than others, linking this to their value: ‘[t]he value of books is proportionate to what may be called plasticity’. By plasticity she means ‘their quality of being all things to all men, of being diversely moulded by the impact of fresh forms of thoughts’. In Wharton’s view a text of quality enables ‘reciprocal adaptability [...] and real intercourse between book and reader’. And finally, the ‘best books are those from which the best readers have been able to extract the greatest amount of thought of the highest quality’ (VR, p.514).

Wharton’s thinking in 1903 anticipated critics who, as Darnton phrased it in his influential 1986 essay on pursuing a history of reading, ‘have increasingly treated literature as an activity rather than an established body of texts. They insist that a book’s meaning is not fixed on its pages; it is construed by its readers. So reader response has become the key point around which literary analysis turns’.¹⁰² There can be no doubt that Wharton would like her ‘best readers’ to absorb the essence of her books, as John does, but without viewing them as untouchable and their meanings as unalterable. Is Justine’s fatal flaw that she views John’s written annotations as fixed? I propose that it is, that she falls into the trap of viewing text as stable, and that her coincidental, but far-reaching encounter with John’s thoughts on paper doubles up as a snippet of metafiction in the novel. This is Wharton talking about the joint responsibilities of the novelist and reader. This is Wharton talking about her impressionism.

¹⁰² Robert Darnton, ‘First Steps Towards a History of Reading’, *AJFS*, 23 (1986), 5-30 (p.171).

At the same time ‘The Vice of Reading’ makes some allowances for the mechanical or ‘poor reader’. Wharton asks ‘[w]hy should we all be readers? We are not all expected to be musicians; but read we must; and so those that cannot read creatively read mechanically’ (VR, p.514). She does not expect her mechanical readers to notice ‘all the by-paths and cross-cuts of his subject’, to ‘chase after a fleeting allusion’, but for her these are always present, as are the invisible lines of connection between books. A mechanical reader is likely to read and label each book before putting it into storage; in ‘such a mind the books never talk to each other’ (VR, pp.516-7). For Wharton texts never exist in isolation, but form part of a larger whole and the born reader who has perfected the art of reading, listens to the conversation between them. Wharton’s 1903 essay offers provocative evidence for several suggestions raised in this chapter: (a) that she consciously writes for different sorts of readers; (b) that she predicts that some of her readers will do more than read sequentially and will seek the secret or explore the silence; (c) that she as novelist and in true impressionist fashion does not demand the final word regarding the meaning of her texts; (d) and that there may be an executive function that unites her body of work. There is much to reward readers who eschew sequential reading and re-read Wharton’s novels for textual secrets, and those who are familiar with her broader body of work. Fictional secrets within the novels are surrounded by textual secrets, so that each text consists of multiple layers of withheld information that enhance Wharton’s portrayal of women in particular.

Considering whether there may be a larger system at work across Wharton’s narratives, one might recall James’ ‘The Figure in the Carpet’ (1896), and if one were to ask whether there is ‘something to *be* understood’ in ‘the writer’s inmost art’, some ‘exquisite scheme’, the answer would be yes.¹⁰³ Wharton’s women, especially viewed through their engagement with secrets, constitute the brain of the novels considered in this chapter. Flawed as they may be, her women determine what is moral (Lily in *The House of Mirth* and Ellen in *The Age of Innocence*), what is natural (Charity in *Summer*), what is humane (Justine and Bessy in *The Fruit of the Tree* and Charity in *Summer*), and how to survive (Undine in *The Custom of the Country*, Charity in *Summer* and May in *The Age of Innocence*). They love, sometimes mutely and sometimes with abandon, often to their own detriment. They establish boundaries and they cross them too. They achieve all these things through what they reveal and through what they withhold, sometimes on behalf of themselves, sometimes on behalf of others. Very few of Wharton’s female characters experience conventional happy endings. Lily dies from an overdose; Justine stays with a deluded John; Charity marries her adoptive father; Undine’s ambition remains insatiable; Ellen leaves what she perceives as her home;

¹⁰³ Henry James, ‘The Figure in the Carpet’, in *The Aspern Papers and Other Stories*, ed. by Adrian Poole (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp.123-56 (pp.130, 134).

May's life with Newland is built on a deception. However, their controlling influence, which possibly outweighs the need for neat resolutions, is writ large across Wharton's narratives. From an intellectual perspective, the devoted reader who is eager to follow the conversation between Wharton's texts, is bound to notice the recurring presence of women's secrets and discern that those secrets at times stand against social structures and practices that surround and fail her heroines, while also upholding those same structures and practices as part of a compromise that affords her women some agency within a patriarchal world.

2. 'Fine issues'

In 1905 Wharton wrote to Dr Morgan Dix, rector of Trinity Church in New York, that '[n]o novel worth anything can be anything but a novel "with a purpose"', or 'moral issue' (*LEW*, p.99). Taken in combination with her expectation that while the mechanical reader may be unable to 'distinguish between the general tendency of a book – its technical and imaginative value as a whole – and its merely episodic features', born readers (or re-readers or 'overreaders') should have no such trouble, the latter should be well placed to discern the purpose or moral issue of a text (*VR*, p.519). And if Wharton's writing is a 'criticism of life' that exposes 'fine issues' to re-readers, those that affect women directly in her novels demand further scrutiny (*VR*, p.519). Here I focus briefly on two such topical concerns, often shrouded in secrecy, that have not yet been considered in detail to maintain focus on other ideas, but that occupied Wharton as a writer and a woman: divorce and euthanasia.

2.1. Divorce

Lee outlined the striking increase in American divorce figures in the decades running up to and following the turn of the century (*EW*, p.364). These doubled between 1880 and 1900, and again by 1920. This keenly debated phenomenon was enabled by comparatively relaxed divorce laws existing in western states like Utah and Nevada where it was possible to obtain a divorce after only a short period of residence, hence the term 'migratory divorces'.

Wharton and Teddy's friend, Boston judge and novelist Robert Grant (1852-1940), campaigned for a more uniform set of divorce legislation across state borders and fictionalised issues surrounding adultery and divorce (*EW*, p.364; *LEW*, pp.485, 514-5).

There also was a notable exchange of ideas between Grant and Wharton. In a letter dated 25 July 1900, Wharton expresses her admiration of his *Unleavened Bread*, published earlier that year, and its Selma White, a 'hard-driving heroine' with several successive husbands (*LEW*, pp.40-1). Grant in turn credits Wharton for the plot of *The Orchid* (1905), involving a woman who sells her child to her husband as part of their divorce settlement (*EW*, p.364).

Banta pointed out that Wharton's treatment of divorce in her fiction is not homogenous.¹⁰⁴ Compare, for example, the distinct views on divorce encountered by Ellen in *The Age of Innocence* and Undine in *The Custom of the Country*. What was unthinkable in 1870s New York, was becoming increasingly common in the early twentieth century. Yet the fictional, French aristocratic de Chelles family is not even willing to countenance the possibility of divorce, while Wharton pursued her own divorce in France because it was not customary for reporters to gain access to either court proceedings or records in that country (*EW*, pp.396-7). Banta also suggested that Wharton's opinion about staying married or filing for a divorce varies from text to text.¹⁰⁵ In *The Age of Innocence*, Newland supports Ellen's desire for a divorce in a personal capacity (p.27) even if, as her lawyer, he later advises against this course of action (p.71). *The Custom of the Country* satirises migratory divorce and serial marriages. Yet Wharton was engaged in an extra-marital affair between 1908 and 1910 and grappling first with the possibility and then the reality of divorce from Teddy, which she filed for in 1913, the year of the novel's publication.¹⁰⁶

In mid-April 1910, Wharton, hurt and confused by Fullerton's silences, deceptions, and lack of reciprocal amity as she tried to bring the affair to a harmonious conclusion, ended a letter: 'My life was better before I knew you. That is, for me, the sad conclusion of this sad year. And it is a bitter thing to say to the one being one has ever loved d'amour [*aimer d'amour* or 'to love with all self-giving love']' (*LEW*, p.208). Banta concluded that, as the relationship with Fullerton was unwinding, Wharton's greatest regret was not the social stigma of adultery, but the betrayal of her own principles and there is a sense of that regret in her words. She herself obtained a divorce from Teddy on the basis of his adultery, although the situation was rather more complex than that, also involving his physical and mental health and financial dealings (*LEW*, pp.301-2). It seems that while Wharton lamented the deterioration of marriage as an institution and resisted the normalisation of divorce, she recognised that certain marriage partnerships were beyond redemption.

2.2. Euthanasia

Euthanasia was another public concern that particularly engaged Wharton. Euthanasia was, according to Garden, common practice among physicians at the turn of the century, with various efforts to sanction it officially.¹⁰⁷ In 1906 as the Ohio legislature was debating a bill to legalise euthanasia, a highly respected medical practitioner, Dr Kempster, admitted to

¹⁰⁴ Banta, p.66.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.68.

¹⁰⁶ Carol J. Singley, 'Illustrated Chronology', in *A Historical Guide to Edith Wharton*, ed. by Carol J. Singley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp.229-48 (pp.240-1).

¹⁰⁷ Garden, p.240; also see Jacob M. Appel, 'A Duty to Kill? A Duty to Die? Rethinking the Euthanasia Controversy of 1906', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 78 (2004), 610-34.

administering a fatal dose of morphine to a burn victim who was close to death. This admission made headlines across the country, but failed to attract widespread condemnation.¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, a debate was raging between those for the legalisation of euthanasia for the collective welfare of humanity and those against through letters to publications such as the *New York Times*, petitions, and public meetings.¹⁰⁹ Critically, the growing discourse considered the mercy killing of ‘incurables’, as well as the ‘hideously deformed’ and ‘idiotic’ members of society – in today’s language, people with disabilities.¹¹⁰ Those against legalised mercy killing held the view that it is ‘nothing less than homicide, the violent removal of personal agency’.¹¹¹ The movement for the legalisation of euthanasia, headed primarily by Cincinnati heiress Anna Hall, received a considerable boost when Charles Norton, ‘arguably the nation’s most prominent living intellectual’ and father of Wharton’s friend Sally, published ‘An Appeal to Reason as well as Compassion’ in both the *New York Sun* and the *Boston Herald*.¹¹²

Wharton worked hard at elements in *The Fruit of the Tree* relating to industrial reform, educating herself by visiting noisy Massachusetts textile mills and also making an effort to respond to readers’ criticism of the serialised novel before it appeared in volume format. However, the issue in the book that attracted her effortlessly was that of euthanasia, hence, perhaps, the ‘comparatively sloppy, vague picture of factory life’ *versus* the meticulous exploration of the fallout of Justine’s actions (*EWA*, pp.44-5).¹¹³ Wharton herself appears to have been a proponent of euthanasia. After her friend Ethel Cram’s fatal accident, she repeatedly wrote to Anna Bahlmann of Ethel’s suffering during August 1905: ‘We returned to sad news of Ethel Cram – one side paralyzed, & she is dying, though, alas, *so* slowly! If only she could be released’, and ‘Poor Ethel Cram lies in the same state – over five weeks after the accident – still unconscious, & doomed to die, but, alas, not for weeks, I fear. To me she has long been dead already’.¹¹⁴ To Sally Norton she wrote that it would be better to ‘let life ebb out quietly in such cases’ (*EW*, p.207). Years later, shortly after the death of her beloved Walter Berry in 1927, she wrote to Mildred Bliss of her experience of his final days:

[...] I had at least the comfort of knowing that he understood everything I said, & that his thoughts travelled back with mine over our long long friendship. That is the only memory that I can bear to dwell on now – for the sight of that imprisoned agonised mind, pleading for expression out of his poor vivid eyes, would be too cruel otherwise – is too cruel still, at times.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁸ Appel, pp.610-1.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p.613.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p.620; Garden, p.240.

¹¹¹ Kassanoff, p.73.

¹¹² Appel, pp.614, 617.

¹¹³ Tuttleton, ‘Justine’, pp.158, 161.

¹¹⁴ Goldman-Price, *My Dear Governess*, pp.197, 199.

¹¹⁵ Wharton to Bliss, 5 November 1927. Series XI, Box 65, Folder 1793.

Her words capture how much Berry's mute suffering had affected her, and it seems unlikely that she would have wished to prolong it unnecessarily. Wharton's interest in euthanasia, so evident in *The Fruit of the Tree*, may be traced back to at least 1901 when she penned *The Shadow of a Doubt*, a play that also has the wishes and decisions of two women at its centre.¹¹⁶ Considering the newly discovered origins of the novel, Mary Chinery and Laura Rattray argued that it may well have been Lucretia Jones' paralysed and unconscious state in the year leading up to her death in June 1901 that awakened Wharton's interest in the topic.¹¹⁷

III. SECRETS: A CONCLUSION

The fictional secrets in *The House of Mirth*, *The Custom of the Country* and *The Age of Innocence* are all closely related to illicit relationships between men and women, and the potential repercussions of disclosure are nearly always more serious for the latter. In a conservative, closed society where a woman's security depended on her marriageability, murky pasts, illicit affairs and divorce carried a heavy penalty. There is an explicit connection between the gender of Wharton's secret owners and the nature of their secrets, despite the fact that some of these are co-owned by men. These were issues that mattered in the lives of contemporary women; they mattered in Wharton's own life, and the extent to which she includes them in her writing even suggests that they represent a larger interpretative system. Wharton's penetrating insight into the workings of secrecy also allowed her to show that how, why and when secret information is divulged or not may be gendered decisions, dictated by the divergent concerns of men and women. However, she also wanted to write beyond the concerns of women and one result of this aim is *The Fruit of the Tree*. Although nursing historically was and remains a predominantly female profession, mercy killing is neither exclusive nor necessarily of greater import to women, although their traditionally liminal position could (or should) make women more aware of the lack of agency in the disempowered.¹¹⁸ The principal agent in *The Fruit of the Tree* is a woman, reminding us of Wharton's claim of executing her subjects like a woman. This may be why the novel investigates the effects of Justine's secret on her marriage, rather than on legal or medical considerations, and why after successfully establishing Justine's credible professional judgement and empathy, Wharton's catches her in a lie and a secret threatens to destroy her personal happiness. Thematically *Summer* straddles the current. It is a novel about existing on the edges of civilisation and waning morality, but it is very much about women too. The only conclusion to be drawn is that it is of considerable significance that the

¹¹⁶ Chinery and Rattray, 'Discovering', pp.91, 101.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., pp.105-6.

¹¹⁸ Garden, p.223.

author of these novels is female. She is concerned with her heroines' concerns, whether she approves of or condemns them. Her concern is shaped by her gendered subjectivity and her own experiences in the world, and by her desire to investigate and sometimes break the existing mould in both a personal and professional sense.

The extent to which novelist and heroines aligned only became discoverable after Wharton's death. She consciously and strategically managed her own secrets, just as she did those of her female characters, but the business of any novelist is, after all, to sell texts, and by extension secrets. The paradox of an emphasis on textual destruction in novels that themselves mediate secrets through text is complicated by another paradox, namely that monetised textual exchange occurs in novels that themselves represent monetised textual exchange. Wharton was a shrewd businesswoman to whom such exchange, signifying commercial success, was essential.¹¹⁹ Was she driven to secrecy during her own lifetime by a sense of privacy only, or also by her business sense? During her lifetime, her audience expected her to be 'Edith Wharton', not one of her 'complicated, flawed, sensual, curious, and creative' heroines. Contemporary reviews are instructive for grasping these expectations. Reviews of *The House of Mirth* refer to the novelist as 'a highly cultivated and witty woman', 'a serious writer' and 'an authoritative one', one of the 'foremost exponents of cultivated American life in fiction', 'born in New York, and on both sides [...] of old New York Stock', 'a writer who can discuss social phases with authority', and as watching 'from the bower of her fine art'.¹²⁰ Reviews of *The Custom of the Country* describe Wharton as emerging 'from her own sphere', a 'nervous, cultivated American woman', while those of *The Fruit of the Tree* note the good pedigrees of both the hero and heroine, linking them directly to Wharton's interests as author, and her 'insight', 'knowledge' and 'skill' that set her apart from the 'easy producers of popular stories'.¹²¹ Wharton's charitable activities, her 'splendid work', during the war are emphasised by one reviewer of *Summer*; others remind readers of her maturity and sophistication as novelist, of her being 'born to the social purple and to the intellectual purple', yet capable of 'fine disdain' towards snobbery.¹²² A response to *The Age of Innocence* noted that in contrast to 'almost all the novelists who write about fashionable New York', Wharton 'knows about her world', that she

belongs to the "quality", and the grand manner is hers by right of birth. She is as finished as a Sheraton sideboard, and with her poise, grace, high standards, and perfect breeding, she suggests as inevitably old wine and slender decanters. [...] She belongs to an earlier age, before a strident generation had come to deny the excellence of standards.¹²³

¹¹⁹ For example, Towheed, 'Introduction', pp.26, 32-4.

¹²⁰ Tuttleton, Lauer and Murray, pp.110, 115, 119-21, 124.

¹²¹ Ibid., pp.148-8, 203, 207,

¹²² Ibid., pp.247, 255-6.

¹²³ Ibid., pp.287, 293-4.

Wharton's image as grand lady of letters was founded firmly in reality, if lacking in texture, and to nurture that image, a tight hold was required on the self-narrative that she offered the world.

CHAPTER 3: SILENCE IN EDITH WHARTON'S WRITINGS

Ryszard Kapuściński described the genre of literary reportage as the work of 'missionaries, translators and messengers' who 'do not translate from one text into another, but from one culture into another in order to make them mutually better understood and thereby closer'.¹ This is also a valid description of Wharton's eyewitness accounts of the Great War and of French Morocco, as this chapter will explore. The cultures that Kapuściński translated were often African, and often those of war, providing further justification for exploring Wharton's writing as reportage in Kapuściński's sense.² His understanding of such reporting is complemented by Joseph North's. In 1935 North introduced reportage to his American audience as 'three-dimensional reporting' through which the writer 'not only condenses reality', but 'helps the reader feel the fact'.³ Such 'revolutionary writers' contextualise an event by relating it to the past, present and future, and 'their report is both an analysis and an experience, culminating in an implicit course of action'.⁴ The effects of letting the reader 'feel the fact', and ultimately of action, are achieved through the kind of writing in which, as Kapuściński put it, 'authentic events, true stories and accidents are described with language containing the writer's personal opinions and reactions and often fictional asides as added color; with the techniques and manners of fiction, that is'.⁵ On one occasion he described the 'egoism' in his writing as:

always complaining about the heat or the hunger or the pain I feel. But it is terribly important to have what I write authenticated by its being lived. You could call it, I suppose, personal reportage, because the author is always present. I sometimes call it literature by foot.⁶

The end product is a 'creative and enriched combination' of fiction and of press chronicle.⁷

Indeed, while North contended that the writing of reportage is not the same as writing a novel, he also proposed that reportage is to the novel what the cartoonist's sketch is to the mural, confirming the connection between the two genres, as also evidenced, I argue here, in Wharton's practice.⁸

Alan Price used the term 'reportage' with reference to Wharton's 'best writing during the war [...] from various points on the front and from Paris'; Olin-Ammentorp and Alice Kelly

¹ Ryszard Kapuściński, 'Herodotus and the Art of Noticing', *New Perspectives Quarterly*, 21 (2004), 50-3 (p.53).

² Michael T. Kaufman, 'Ryszard Kapuscinski, Polish Writer of Shimmering Allegories and News, Dies at 74', *The New York Times*, 24 January 2007 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/24/world/europe/24kapuscinski.html>> [accessed 10 January 2018].

³ Joseph North, 'Reportage', in *American Writer's Congress*, ed. by Henry Hart (New York: International Publishers, 1935), pp.120-3 (p.121).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Kapuściński, 'Herodotus', p.52.

⁶ Kaufman, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/24/world/europe/24kapuscinski.html>>.

⁷ Kapuściński, 'Herodotus', p.52.

⁸ North, p.123.

employed it too.⁹ I argue that Wharton's novelist's impulse, whether in her war or travel accounts, is never entirely absent and has a particular and direct effect both on how she portrays silence in these works, and on the issues that she chooses to highlight or conceal, sometimes with political ends. This same impulse validates *Fighting France*'s status as a work of war reportage, rather than of war correspondence. As I will demonstrate, Wharton gives the facts of war a human face and inserts herself into their telling to make the reader 'feel' them. Kate McLoughlin observed that war reporting in the American context is always tasked with "‘bringing home’ the unfamiliar and [is] often an occasion for piquing an isolationist nation into intervention’."¹⁰ Wharton's impulse to tell a particular story, emphasising some aspects while shrouding others in silence, is connected to her self-appointed diplomatic mission to combat American isolationism, to create awareness of the Allied cause among her American audiences, and to maintain her war relief work in France. Her understanding of the socio-political circumstances affecting Morocco likewise transforms her account of her experiences in this country towards the end of the Great War (late 1917) into an example of public diplomacy, but even the fictional world created in *The Reef*, inhabited by women responding to real-world socio-economic obstacles, is a vivid illustration of what might be called drawing-room diplomacy, or the rules that govern private society and ensure its smooth operation. The silences of its characters constitute an exercise in diplomacy within the narrative that often serves to uphold individual relationships, as well as gender and class roles, and sometimes to undermine them, without seeming to, through mute resistance. It should not be a surprise that the hero of *The Reef*, around whom much of the intrigue in the plot swirls, is a professional diplomat.

Wharton was well prepared to depict, comment on, and even practise diplomacy through her writings. Her social background schooled her in the artful management of private relations; as demonstrated often in her novels, Lucretia Jones' daughter understood contemporary drawing-room diplomacy, nor did she shy away from making use of a social network rich in individuals engaged in official diplomacy and international relations. In practical terms her connections during the war years prompted her to offer assistance to her friend Berenson in securing 'some sort of Embassy job' in Paris and even to invite him to join *Les Tuberculeux de la Guerre* on an official letterhead, copied to the undersecretary of the Ministry of Health. They also ensured her access to the 'French diplomatic valise', facilitating delivery of manuscripts to American publishers and parcels to friends.¹¹ Wharton eventually would

⁹ Alice Kelly, 'Introduction: Wharton in Wartime', in Edith Wharton, *Fighting France: From Dunkerque to Belfort*, ed. by Alice Kelly (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), pp.1-73 (p.37); Julie Olin-Ammentorp, 'Wharton and World War I', p.297; Price, p.181.

¹⁰ Kate McLoughlin, 'Edith Wharton: War Correspondent', *Edith Wharton Review*, 21 (2005), 1-10 (p.1).

¹¹ Price, pp.107-8, 112.

draw on her connections to play her part on a rather bigger stage too. As I discuss later, they expedited her visits to the European frontlines and Morocco, and they supported her philanthropic activities and ensured her advocating voice an audience that included influential American policy makers. In 1915 the committee for her war charities included Walter Berry, President of the American Chamber of Commerce in Paris; Mildred Bliss, who was married to the secretary of the American Embassy in Paris; and Alice Garrett, wife of the special assistant to the American ambassador, later stationed in the Hague (*EW*, p.560). John Garrett provided Wharton with repeated diplomatic aid during the war by enquiring after displaced persons on her behalf.¹² An occasion that foregrounds her diplomatic connections was a dinner, at his request, in December 1917 with Colonel Edward M. House, an aide to Woodrow Wilson who also happened to mediate between Georges Clémenceau and David Lloyd George as they determined military and political control of the Allied forces. The party included Berry, Berenson, historian Royall Tyler (1884-1953) and journalist Fullerton.¹³ Wharton was also an admirer and friend of Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919), whose second inauguration in 1905 saw the Whartons lunch at the White House and who, more importantly, shared her conviction that America was duty-bound to support the Allied war effort (*EW*, pp.154-5, 452). My examination of Wharton's silences does not, however, start on the international stage at this time of crisis, but in the home, during a time of peace.

I. SILENCE AT HOME: *THE REEF*

1. Introduction

In 1903 Wharton published a novella, *Sanctuary*, which explores the positive, transformative power of female silence. This is made explicit when the young Dick Peyton explains to his mother how her strategic reticence has guided him through a moral crisis:

If you'd said a word – if you'd tried to influence me – the spell would have been broken. But just because the actual *you* kept apart and didn't meddle or pry, the other, the you in my heart, seemed to get a tighter hold on me.¹⁴

Wharton would return to the theme of silence in 1911, with the publication of *Ethan Frome*, a story about the 'inarticulateness, reticence, and silence of New Englanders who cannot or will not tell their story to outside observers' and 'the inaccessibility of what goes on inside others'.¹⁵ Wharton described the characters of *Ethan Frome* as her '*granite outcroppings*', 'half emerged from the soil, and scarcely more articulate'.¹⁶ Indeed, Ethan Frome the character seems 'a part of the mute melancholy landscape' to the narrator of the story (p.10).

¹² Price, pp.85, 95.

¹³ Ibid., p.138.

¹⁴ Edith Wharton, *Sanctuary* (London: Hesperus Press, 2006), p.93.

¹⁵ Waid, pp.62-3.

¹⁶ Edith Wharton, *Ethan Frome*, intro. by Elaine Showalter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

The latter, at ‘the provocation of Mrs Hale’s silence’ (p.8), but also as a result of having it ‘bit by bit, from various people’ (p.3), has to ‘put together’ an imagined ‘vision’ of Ethan’s story (p.17). The two texts, written years apart, are indicative of Wharton’s long-standing interest in the act of not saying things, in things that are not said, and in the effects of both. Although its setting, characters and plot bear little obvious resemblance to those of her earlier texts, she continues to pursue these preoccupations in *The Reef*, a lesser-known novel that is also suffused by silences. In this part of the chapter I explore three features of *The Reef*: reticence as a central, and also differential, aspect of female characterisation, Wharton’s use of rhetorical silences, and the power of silences to reveal.

2. Reticence and female characterisation, imposed silences and victimisation

The Reef was conceived and written between the spring of 1911 and the summer of 1912, a creative period that coincided with the final collapse of Wharton’s marriage. She sought a discreet divorce from Teddy through the French courts in April 1913, the same year that saw publication of *The Custom of the Country* – Undine Spragg was about to give readers a master class in the socio-economic advantages of expedient marriage. It is small wonder that Wharton’s writing in the years directly preceding should have investigated the ‘nice’ behaviour traditionally expected of women in her social sphere and so exuberantly rejected by Undine (*FW*, p.207). In order to do so, *The Reef* brings together a small group of American expatriates at Givré, an ‘old house seated in its park among the poplar-bordered meadows of middle France’ (p.88). Old New Yorkers Anna Leath and George Darrow renew their former romantic relationship, while her stepson, Owen, is raring to announce his engagement to her daughter’s governess, Sophy Viner. Anna and Owen are unaware of a brief, past dalliance between George and Sophy, a betrayal that is about to disrupt their present and an episode in George’s ‘erotic history [...] that dominates *The Reef*’.¹⁷ Wharton herself uses the word ‘nice’, always in inverted commas, when outlining Lucretia Jones’ view of the world. Nice people were ‘respectable’ individuals doing ‘reputable’ things (*ABG*, pp.23, 35). Nice young women, girls like *Summer*’s Annabel Balch or *The Age of Innocence*’s May Welland, did not ‘really *have* feelings’ to be explained and kept themselves “‘pure” for their husbands’ (*NG*, pp.36-7). This made them, in Newland Archer’s language, worthy of love and respect, prized ‘like a fine object of art or a spirited horse’ (*EWA*, p.95). Anna exemplifies this category of women, while Sophy’s history with George excludes her from it. Thus *The Reef* also sheds light on sexuality and suppression or expression thereof, especially by women, through a prism of silence.

¹⁷ Richard A. Kaye, ‘Edith Wharton and the “New Gomorrah” of Paris: Homosexuality, Flirtation, and Incestuous Desire in *The Reef*’, *Modern Fiction Studies*, 43 (1997), 860-97 (p.876).

I wish to focus first on ‘silences and reticence as consciously or unconsciously chosen strategies for effect’ by the author, as considered by Stout.¹⁸ According to such a view silences are not ‘accidental gaps’, but intended or significant ‘spaces which are fully integral to the text as read’.¹⁹ Stout’s work did not focus on Wharton, but she identified Wharton as another writer who has ‘employed suppressions and withholdings as an aggressive rhetorical strategy’.²⁰ To examine Wharton’s use of such an approach, I draw in passing on Stout’s analysis of Jane Austen’s (1775-1817) writing in particular, which concludes that while the novelist is not critical of open communication, she advocates ‘judicial communication, and this means at times judicial silence’.²¹ My question is whether this is how Wharton uses silence and reticence in *The Reef*, especially in relation to the novel’s heroines. The summary response is that while silence and reticence, or lack thereof, are integral features of the characterisation of this novel’s female characters, the thematic concerns of the novel with the social imposition of reticence on, and the victimisation of, women complicate the elegant notion that characters of moral worth and intelligence communicate more judiciously than others. Wharton impresses on her reader from the start that Anna’s reticence is imposed, rather than voluntary. It is rooted firmly in the drawing-room diplomacy of genteel Old New York that governs daily interactions characterised by niceness, smooths the path towards suitable marriages, and works to maintain an exclusive social *status quo*. Anna recalls that in the ‘well-regulated well-fed Summers world the unusual was regarded as either immoral or ill-bred, and people with emotions were not visited’ (p.90). Left unsaid here is that men of her class do not apply such exclusivity as rigorously as its women, leading to the gendered double standard governing sexual behaviour.

Anna’s understanding of what is moral and well-bred was the reason for her reserve when she first fell in love with George. Through Anna’s point of view, Wharton offers readers a rare insight into her well-heeled heroines’ consciousness as they grapple with emotions, physical desire, and the conventions that ring-fence their self-expression. Young Anna Summers found that ‘the things she really wanted to say choked in her throat and burned the palms of her hands’ (p.93). This was when she would lie awake, wondering what some other silly girl was saying to George, and asking a little hopelessly: “‘How shall I learn to say such things?’” (pp.93-4). She ‘decided that her heart would tell her – that the next time they were alone together the irresistible word would spring to her lips’, only to find that it did not (p.94). Instead, ‘the irresistible word fled with a last wing-beat into the golden mist of her illusions...’ (p.94). Anna’s inability to find the ‘right’ words then, cost her George who

¹⁸ Stout, p.viii.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp.3-4.

²⁰ Ibid., p.20.

²¹ Ibid., pp.32-3.

thought the silly girl ‘rather good fun’ (p.94), and demonstrates some of the consequences of silence. Comparing her to Sophy years later, George laments Anna’s ‘reticences and evasions’, her ‘hesitations and reserves’, and recognises them as ‘the result of the deadening process of forming a “lady”’ (pp.40-1), just as he admires the restraint that pervades even her appearance: ‘His imagination was struck by the quality of reticence in her beauty’ that suggests ‘a fine portrait kept down to a few tones, or a Greek vase on which the play of the light is the only pattern’ (p.126). He reminds himself in a phrase that alludes to Anna’s reticence with words, as well as her sexual hesitation, that her ‘eyes had made promises which her lips were afraid to keep’ (p.41). Understanding Anna’s behaviour as exacted by society, does not change George’s expectations which, if met, can only serve to lessen her desirability as a partner.

This exact impasse had led to their youthful separation, ‘the fluttering apart of two seed-vessels on a wave of summer air...’ (p.41) and created fertile ground for the self-edited, sparse compliments that characterised Fraser Leath’s subsequent courtship of Anna: “‘I didn’t suppose I should find any one here who would feel about these things as I do’”; “‘I know no one but you would really appreciate it’” (pp.94-5). Fraser’s restraint makes Anna assume a shared ‘scale of values’ between them; she shows herself to him ‘as she had never known how to reveal herself to Darrow’ (p.95). He in turn promises to “‘say things now and then that will horrify’” her parents, or “‘shock them awfully’” (p.95). In reality his alleged unconventionality is governed by ‘rigid conformity to his rules of non-conformity’, while ‘his skepticism had the absolute accent of a dogma’ (p.97). Fraser possesses an unspoken, ‘forbidden sexual life’ of which even Anna is aware, as Richard Kaye pointed out, but which excludes her.²² I agree with comparisons drawn in this respect with James’ Isabel Archer’s choice of an ‘effete dilettante’ over two ‘sexually vibrant suitors’.²³ Fraser ‘collects’ Anna like he collects snuffboxes. Like Gilbert Osmond, Fraser seems in Tony Tanner’s words a ‘curiously, hollow insubstantial man’.²⁴ Meanwhile Mrs Summers and Anna’s mother-in-law, Madame de Chantelle, are ‘completely in accord on all the momentous minutiae of drawing-room conduct’ (p.97), minutiae that are integral to the ‘spell of unreality’ that Anna has sought, unsuccessfully, to escape.

Society’s imposition of silence upon Anna has a long reach. When she is reunited with George at Givré fifteen years later, she expects that ‘as soon as they began to talk more intimately they would feel that they knew each other less well’ (p.110), suggesting that

²² Kaye, p.880.

²³ For example, Kassanoff, p.103.

²⁴ Tony Tanner, ‘The Fearful Self: Henry James’s *The Portrait of a Lady*’, *Critical Quarterly*, 7 (1965), 205-19 (p.209).

words continue to obstruct a true connection between them. Indeed, their first serious topic of discussion involves obstructions. George states that ““there are to be no more obstacles now”” (p.112), at which Anna exclaims, startled out of her silent musing, ““Obstacles?”” [...] “What obstacles?”” (p.112). George is referring to Anna’s telegram, asking him to delay his visit: ‘Unexpected obstacle. Please don’t come till thirtieth.’ (p.17), the fateful message that acts as a catalyst for his dalliance with Sophy. Wharton has their first serious exchange of words in the novel recall all that stands in their way: Anna’s silence and George’s reaction to it. It is striking too that when Anna finally succeeds in revealing herself to George during their conversation, when she finds the ‘right’ words, he is lost in a thought of his own and fails to listen to what she says: ‘She clasped her hands on Darrow’s arm. “I want our life to be like a house with all the windows lit: I’d like to string lanterns from the roofs and chimneys!”’ (p.121). Anna is asking for complete transparency between herself, the man that she loves, and the world, only to discover that his face ‘gave back no reflection of her words’; ‘his face continued to wear the abstracted look of a man who is not listening to what is said to him’ (p.121). Wharton’s uniformly lit house may be read as an intertextual reference to the house of fiction in James’ preface to the New York edition of *The Portrait of a Lady* (1908). His use of the image to consider how writers approach reality through ‘not one window, but a million – a number of possible windows not to be reckoned’, draws attention to authorial choices and influence, like the ones effected by Wharton in *The Reef*.²⁵ The latter provides only two perspectives, Anna’s and George’s, in turn and in tandem, and so privileges at times the male or female point of view, and at others the older, genteel generation’s. This subjectivity contrasts with the state of full illumination, sought by Anna and itself another intertextuality that shows Wharton writing back to James. Isabel Archer’s midnight reflection on the state of her marriage finds that it has led her ‘downward and earthward, into realms of restriction and depression where the sound of other lives, easier and freer, was heard as from above’, and that she now dwells in the ‘house of darkness, the house of numbness, the house of suffocation’.²⁶

Anna, who knows nothing yet of what will wedge George and herself apart and having only just discovered the pleasure of being able to speak to him, tells herself: ‘He does not care what I say – it’s enough that I say it – even if it’s stupid he’ll like me better for it...’ (p.122). She is right to an extent. George enjoys open and natural conversation with women. In Paris he compares Sophy’s enthusiastic response to the actress Cerdine’s name above a theatre:

It’s delicious just to *know* she’s there! I’ve never seen her, you know. When I was here with Mamie Hoke we never went anywhere but to the music halls, because she couldn’t understand French; and when I came back afterward to the

²⁵ Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady*, ed. by Robert D. Bamberg (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), p.7.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.356, 360.

Farlows' I was dead broke, and couldn't afford the play, and neither could they; so the only chance we had was when friends of theirs invited us – and once it was to see a tragedy by a Roumanian lady, and the other time it was for 'L'Ami Fritz' at the Français

to Anna's thoughts on the matter: 'No. I meant to [attend the play], of course, but one is so overwhelmed with things in Paris. And then I'm rather sick of Cerdine – one is always being dragged to see her' (p.43). Anna's formal reply appears jaded against Sophy's unrestrained response. George finds Sophy 'the more engaging, for being so natural, and so unashamed of showing the frank greed of her famished youth' (p.44). Much of her ample conversation is reported by him, rather than presented in speech marks. This is an authorial choice that, on a technical level, lends George authority over the young woman within the narrative and that reflects the kind of silencing of women observed by feminist commentators. I suggest that rather than wishing herself to silence Sophy, Wharton condemns the impulse.

Sophy acknowledges that she does not always pick the right words when it matters: "'It's my fault for not knowing how to say what I want you to hear. Your words are different; you know how to choose them. Mine offend you...'" (p.283). Such 'flashes of shrewdness' (p.50) by Sophy are interspersed by shows of naivety. George realises that she appreciates Paris for its 'endless ingenuities of pleasantness' (p.51). She wonders over a meal where else 'could one find the dear little dishes of *hors d'oeuvre*, the symmetrically-laid anchovies and radishes, the thin golden shells of butter, or the wood strawberries and brown jars of cream that gave to their repast the last refinement of rusticity' (p.51). She asks if he had not noticed 'that cooking always expressed the national character, and that French food was clever and amusing just because the people were' (p.51), or how 'dishes always resembled the talk – how the very same platitudes seemed to go into people's mouths and come out of them' in private houses (p.52). Sophy's talk about talk is patently glib, fulsome and verbose, as Stout described Austen's characters that 'are found wanting', her 'tongue rattling on as it pleased' (p.48), but George is a step removed from it.²⁷ He watches her enjoyment of their meal and wonders condescendingly 'if her vividness and vivacity were signs of her calling [to the stage]' (p.52). He imagines that she 'had been dying for some one to talk to, some one before whom she could unfold and shake out to the light her poor little shut-away emotions' after '[y]ears of repression' (p.49). George's reception of and response to Sophy's voice says more about his character than about hers. When she struggles over her note to the Farlows: "'I simply can't think how to say it'"'; "'I never *could* write a telegram!'"'; "'I wish I weren't such an idiot about writing: all the words get frightened and scurry away when I

²⁷ Stout, p.28.

try to catch them” (p.53), his thoughts stray to Anna’s ‘slender firm strokes of the pen’ and ‘clear structure’ of phrases (p.54) that suggest a process of careful editing.

Sophy’s inability to put her thoughts down on paper in an orderly way, and her unreserved commentary on that inability, emphasise the chattering quality of her conversation – her spontaneity *versus* Anna’s considered, self-censoring responses. However, despite her moments of naivety and inability to construct a telegram, Sophy is far from stupid. George is struck from the first by Sophy’s ‘quickness’ (p.30), by the fact that she ‘caught him up in a flash’, ‘didn’t miss things!’, and ‘had stuff in her eyes’ (p.32). She may have survived ‘by acting in some vague social capacity in the large homes of the wealthy’, as Griffin Wolff put it, but she is sufficiently shrewd to carve out a living despite being an unsupervised orphan (*FW*, p.209). In this, George views her as ‘distinguished from the daughters of wealth by her avowed acquaintance with the real business of living’ (p.39). Indeed, she seems a kinder, less ruthless, moral version of *The Custom of the Country*’s Undine, despite her questionable decision to have an affair with him. She has made an honest living (pp.36-7), takes care not to exceed her financial means (p.71), and even warns George not to trust her, as she ‘might never be able to pay up!’ (p.76).

Another reason to be critical of the notion that those of moral worth and intelligence communicate more judiciously in this novel, is its underlying theme of victimisation. The text hints at George’s self-indulgent dealings with women on a couple of occasions. The first is when Anna recalls her younger self observing him laughing, ‘talking, talking’, and looking at Kitty Mayne, ‘heroine’ of a then recent ‘elopement which had shaken West Fifty-fifth Street to its base’, in a way that ‘would have offended her once’ (p.93), the implication behind the words being that that was no longer the case. When Anna asked George about his friendship with Kitty, his remark that she was ‘rather good fun’ dissolved her hopes (p.94) and soon thereafter a ‘rapid passage’ or brief dalliance between George and Kitty was confirmed (p.95). The second hint is when George meets Sophy on their way to Paris. Her face ‘woke in him a memory of having seen it at a distant time and in a vaguely unsympathetic setting’ (p.25); he finds himself ‘connecting her with something uncomfortable and distasteful’ (p.27). The reason behind George’s sensations soon becomes clear. Sophy was the ‘reader’ of one Mrs Murrett, an American hostess with an ‘awful house’ in Chelsea where he had previously pursued Lady Ulrica Crispin (pp.28-9) – Lady Ulrica who has left him with a ‘contemptuous distaste’ for the type of woman ‘who uses the privileges of one class to shelter the customs of another’ (p.38). Sophy is seeking a new beginning in Paris, having just “‘parted in tears [from Mrs Murrett] – but not in silence!’” (p.29). Thus George’s history of undiscerning amorous pursuits takes shape. His treatment

of Sophy, however, also demonstrates the predatory nature of his behaviour and this theme overshadows any lingering doubts over Sophy's character, evoked by her lack of reserve and unrestrained conversation.

The situation in which he finds her, on her way to Paris where she vaguely plans to 'study for the stage' (p.33), is one of vulnerability. Sophy has no dependable guardian figure, income or fixed abode. In fact, she is temporarily stripped of all her possessions, having lost even her trunk (p.26). She is also very young. When she struggles to write her note, George compares her to a 'school-girl struggling with a "composition"' (p.54); later his feelings regarding her are 'fraternal [...] almost fatherly' and he sees her as an 'appealing young creature' (p.61). He observes the 'freshness' of her face (p.66), and when

she talked to him about "life" – the word was often on her lips – she seemed to him like a child playing with a tiger's cub; and he said to himself that some day the child would grow up – and so would the tiger (p.68).

When he persuades her to let him 'treat' her to a short stay in Paris, he tells himself that he is giving her 'a child's holiday to look back to' (p.78). She asks him, incredulously: "'Is it true? Is it really going to happen to *me*?'"' and he answers in the affirmative: "'All that and more too – you'll see!'" (p.78). Upon re-reading the novel his words take on a darker meaning. Sophy does indeed grow up, emotionally and sexually, as a result of the thirty-seven-year-old George's intervention (p.127), and her life becomes unpredictable and perilous. The understanding that George forms inappropriate relationships with women is compounded by a recent analysis of Wharton's portrayals of girls; in this regard Goldsmith noted George's dreams of fathering Anna's sweet but unruly daughter, Effie. The word Goldsmith used to describe George's thoughts about Effie is 'fetishises'.²⁸ He imagines receiving Effie's 'first filial kiss' before even meeting her, as the 'charm[ed] [...] figure of the child who might – who should – have been his', as 'giving him back the magic hour he had missed and mourned' (p.209). She becomes 'the mystical offspring of the early tenderness between himself and Anna Summers' (p.136). Considering his exploitative history with the girl's governess, George's 'fatherly' attitude towards Effie is perturbing.

There are reasons other than her youth to describe George's brief affair with Sophy as exploitative. He views her hunger for fine cultural expressions as 'a fine chance to experiment' (p.43); allows 'the excitement of pursuit' to suppress his 'fugitive twinge of compunction' when he remembers her youth (p.77); and embraces her as an 'absorbing interest [...] as an escape from himself and an object about which his thwarted activities [involving Anna] could cluster' (p.64). George, who thinks of his profession as

²⁸ Meredith Goldsmith, 'Wharton's Wayward Girls' in *The New Edith Wharton Studies*, ed. by Jennifer Haytock and Laura Rattray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp.217-30 (pp.219-20).

‘experimenting on life’ (p.127), here fittingly employs his diplomatic skills towards an entirely selfish, mercenary cause, namely to use a young woman in order to experiment, pursue and escape from his thwarted personal life. Madame de Chantelle’s grand vision of him ‘seducing Duchesses when he was not negotiating Treaties’ (p.134) cannot be further from the truth. He knows that Sophy, who has professed herself to be thoroughly modern, will ‘waste no time in protestations and objections, or any vain sacrifice to the idols of conformity’; she ‘would either accept his suggestion, or she would not’ (p.47). He is able to use his knowledge of her convictions to further his own interests – and to convince himself that doing so is also to her advantage, giving her all the things that she has never had (p.73). He judges too that ‘most wrongdoing works, on the whole, less mischief than its useless confession; and that this was clearly a case where a passing folly might be turned, by avowal, into a serious offense’ (p.72). Taking into account this indicator of George’s flawed moral compass, it is difficult not to be cynical when he declares to Sophy, ‘with a smile’, that his ‘designs’ are not ‘nefarious’ (p.75). This is a man who appropriates for his ‘complex masculine nature’ the ‘ministering’ of women who may be described as ladies, as well as those who may not (p.38), and who characterises these encounters to himself as life dropping ‘now and then, below a more ideal measure’ (p.128). He justifies these ‘declines’ as ‘brief, parenthetic, incidental’, adding that in terms of ‘recognized essentials he had always remained strictly within the limit of his scruples’ (p.128). George the diplomat manages to persuade even himself of his moral worth. When, ten days after their arrival at a Parisian hotel, he finds himself looking at and hating the ‘door of communication with the next room [Sophy’s]’ (p.81), it seems safe to assume that his experiment has been completed. He is eventually forced to admit that his ‘shame’ lies in this having been “‘a case of not feeling’” (p.289). George’s abuse of power in his dealings with Sophy shows his own, socially facilitated, moral weakness. By introducing this into her narrative, Wharton shows the irrelevance of Sophy’s non-conformative engagement with traditional expectations of female reticence.

Sophy’s frank and easy verbal expression towards George evolves into sexual expression, but the text is virtually silent about this aspect of their relationship. Readers are again given only George’s point of view. Sophy’s story is never told in her own words; she remains largely voiceless. Wharton’s choice of narrative strategy is an accurate reflection of contemporary socio-politics prior to the magnification and interrogation of traditional gender and class roles by the Great War, but I hesitate to conclude that she condones them.²⁹

²⁹ Juliet Nicolson, *The Great Silence: Britain from the Shadow of the First World War to the Dawn of the Jazz Age* (New York: Grove Press, 2009), pp.2-3, 9; also see Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp.90-3.

George's characterisation is too critical of male arrogance and self-interest for such an assumption. His account of their affair is muted by a generational as well as class preference for silence. By keeping it sparse, Wharton prepares her readers for the shame that he later experiences over his abuse of power. George's account only provides enough detail to establish the sexual nature of their relationship. It indicates his close familiarity with Sophy's room, and the briefest of physical contact between them: her warm hands placed momentarily on his closed eyelids (p.82). Literally and metaphorically George fails to see and empathise with Sophy as an autonomous human being. His lack of empathy is even clearer when he reveals the circumstances surrounding their first kiss; her chatter had become increasingly tedious, their conversation had dried up, and 'the natural substitute for speech had been a kiss' (p.244). In that moment he had imagined her as 'one of the elemental creatures whose emotion is all in their pulses', that his 'caress had restored her to her natural place in the scheme of things', and 'as if he had clasped a tree and a nymph had bloomed from it' (p.245). He also discovered that the 'mere fact of not having to listen to her any longer added immensely to her charm' (p.245). In this account George saves Sophy by silencing her, and as she transforms into her nymph-like state, she momentarily becomes the ideal woman who is tender but silent, and thus combines, in George's view, the best of herself and of Anna.

Anna herself resents her physical aloofness. George's 'passion swept over her like a wind that shakes the roof of the forest without reaching its still glades or rippling its hidden pools'; he 'wanted to kiss her, and she wanted to talk to him about books and pictures', to hear his voice and listen to him (p.92). She thirsts for conversation that requires intellectual engagement and a critical stance, but when they are apart she 'wondered how she could have been so cold, called herself a prude and an idiot [...] and got up in the dead of the night to try new ways of doing her hair' (p.92). Through Anna's privileged point of the view, Wharton says considerably more in the text about the nature of sexual restraint than about reckless abandon, but by also ensuring that Sophy is more than a subplot or shadow element in the novel she is able to explore what happens to women (and those around them) who dare to express themselves sexually, and so critiques the exploitation of women by men, as well as the gendered double standard.³⁰ In practical terms, Sophy's chance of a stable, secure marriage is compromised when her relationship with George comes to light, and this in turn compromises Anna's as well as her stepson Owen's futures. George's automatic reaction to meeting Sophy at Givré is one of denial and rejection. Anna later recognises that George 'never makes a mistake – he always knows what to do' and attributes this skill to 'a kind of

³⁰ Also see Stout, p.50.

professional expertness' (p.296). Always the diplomat, he skirts the truth as closely as possible when he explains his acquaintance with Sophy to Anna and Owen: 'I think Miss Viner and I have met already – several years ago in London' (p.139), signaling his instant resolve to hide their recent affair.

When, at the start of *The Reef*, Sophy describes herself as 'awfully modern', proclaiming simultaneously her uncertain belief in marriage and her intention to avoid the institution altogether, she unwittingly paves the way for George's exploitation (p.69). Men like George want to marry women like Anna whom they can educate in life and love (*EWA*, p.94). In an incomplete holograph manuscript of the novel, George reflects that if Anna 'had been given to him then, he would have put depths in her eyes & warmth in her veins: she would have been woman ~~from to the~~ from head to foot'.³¹ Wharton revisited the phrasing of Anna's envisaged education by George, highlighting the importance of the notion, finally expressed as, 'he would have put warmth in her veins and light in her eyes: would have made her a woman through and through' (p.41). Yet in order to be marriageable, women like Anna need to be 'model[s] of ladylike repression' (p.91), resistant and reticent, and thus they leave a space for women like Sophy, less likely to be described as 'nice' by traditional observers. By examining the unhappy articulation between 'normative' female behaviour, 'transgressive' female behaviour, and exploitative male behaviour that characterises the relationship between Anna, Sophy and George, Wharton casts a particularly critical light on gendered expectations and constraints.

3. Rhetorical silences

Rhetorical silences play a pivotal role in the development of individual scenes within the narrative of *The Reef*, but also further enrich the portrayal of characters and relationships. Grant-Davie's emphasis on the informative value of the spaces that surround words is echoed explicitly in Wharton's novel.³² It is George, the diplomat, who grasps that the quiet spaces that punctuate a conversation may be as meaningful as the words themselves: 'It was not Anna's questions, or his answers to them, that he feared, but what might cry aloud in the intervals between them' (p.183). Wharton emphasises from the start of *The Reef* the unusually close bond that exists between Anna and her stepson, characterised by a mutual understanding that often supersedes the need for words, and that is positioned firmly within the social realist tradition that rejects the need for articulated thoughts and feelings among those who exist in true harmony. This parent-child relationship finds echoes in that of Maggie and Adam Verver in James' *The Golden Bowl* (1904), and draws attention to *The*

³¹ *The Reef* corrected holograph manuscript (incomplete). Series I, Box 11, Folder 307.

³² Grant-Davie, p.2.

Reef's quadrilateral plot. Kaye's contention that in Wharton's novel 'a male's attraction to a "boyish" young woman [Sophy] has its corollary in a woman's incestuous feelings for her own (boyish) relative [Owen]', a reading that reflects the comparatively tolerant socio-historical context in which it was written, is noteworthy.³³ On the latter basis, too, Kaye challenged the relevance of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's theoretical model of homosexual anxiety, arguing that her paradigm is irrelevant to the 'modern French context, where existing legal codes ignored all same-sex sexual activity'.³⁴ Incest, still legal in France if consensual, features repeatedly in Wharton's body of work and Anna and Owen's relationship is certainly characterised as remarkably intimate. She contemplates its closeness, and the inconsequence of words between them, as follows:

Sometimes she fancied that Owen Leath's response was warmer than that of her own child. But then Effie was still hardly more than a baby, and Owen, from the first, had been almost 'old enough to understand': certainly *did* understand now, in a tacit way that yet perpetually spoke to her. This sense of his understanding was the deepest element in their feeling for each other. There were so many things between them that were never spoken of, or even indirectly alluded to, yet that, even in their occasional discussions and differences formed the unadduced arguments making for final agreement... (p.102).

The reason for their closeness is a shared sense of incarceration. When Anna first moved to Givré she and Owen "were like two prisoners who talk to each other by tapping on the wall" (p.235). Forged within the confines of Fraser Leath's regulated world, their wordless connection became an escape. The muteness of their bond is woven into the narrative strategy. Owen's thoughts and feelings are expressed exclusively through his rare direct speech and through Anna, but neither character lingers over life with Fraser. Thus Wharton allows the reader to fill in a past – possibly with reference to James' *The Portrait of a Lady*, which is more forthcoming with the details of Isabel Archer's domestic circumstances – that has been left blank, despite its lasting effect on two of the novel's main characters, as she draws attention to their private bond. Yet eventually the quality of the silence between Anna and Owen is changed, transformed from something that ties into something that obstructs, by the truth regarding their prospective life partners. 'Between them, henceforth, there would always be the wall of an insurmountable silence...' (p.321). In these terms Anna grasps that the figurative wall between them would no longer function as a conduit of wordless conversation, but as a protective barrier that allows each to survive without reference to the other or the history between George and Sophy.

³³ Kaye, pp.868-9.

³⁴ Ibid., p.864; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

Drawing especially on Grant-Davie's work, as outlined in the introductory chapter, I next examine *The Reef* for its rhetorical silences by focusing on two scenes in the novel. The first involves Anna and Owen, and the second Anna and Sophy. Wharton's fastidious approach to the preparation of her work in publication throughout her career – her determination to prevent misprints, to protect her decisions concerning capitalisation, vocabulary and paragraphing, and to employ English spelling and punctuation – invites detailed textual analysis and comparison between different editions of her printed texts.³⁵ *The Reef* was published by Appleton in 1912. The Simon & Schuster edition consulted here is based on that original edition and the punctuation highlighted in the following analysis of rhetorical silences matches that of the Appleton edition almost exactly. In Macmillan's slightly later, definitive imprint of *The Reef* there is only one subtle difference; it distinguishes between the en dash and em dash, with the former functioning as replacement for a comma and the latter signifying a longer pause on the part of the speaker.³⁶ In this regard I follow Macmillan's typography in the text quoted in this subsection, and replicate its and Appleton's inclusion of spaces preceding and following ellipses, and their omission preceding and following dashes. Judging by examples of other texts published in the early 1900s, Macmillan's house style accommodated slight variations, possibly in response to individual writers' preferences. In Gertrude Atherton's (1857-1948) *The Conqueror* (1902), the standard em dash dominates and spaces precede and follow this punctuation, but not the occasional three-dot ellipsis which, unlike Wharton's ellipses, is followed by a full stop at the end of a sentence.³⁷ In Macmillan's 1906 edition of Elizabeth von Arnim's (1866-1941) *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, the em dash instead of a comma is used to indicate interjections in sentences, while an extraordinarily long em dash in direct speech denotes an interruption. No spacing precedes or follows this punctuation.³⁸ Mrs Humphry Ward's (1851-1920) *Diana Mallory* (1908) likewise uses both the standard and longer em dash – the former to indicate an interjection, the latter a longer pause – with no spacing preceding or following this punctuation, but sometimes a comma occurs directly in front of a standard em dash.³⁹ Wharton's liberal use of spaced ellipses and dashes of various lengths lends the text the same kind of 'holed out' or 'hollowed out' appearance that Isabelle Brasme observed in Ford's *Parade's End* (1924-1928) – a 'perforated text' that she read in terms of the shelled Northern French landscapes of the Great War.⁴⁰ *The Reef* is too early for such a connection,

³⁵ Girling, pp.64-5, 69, 71-2; Towheed, 'Introduction', p.35.

³⁶ Edith Wharton, *The Reef* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1912).

³⁷ Gertrude Franklin Atherton, *The Conqueror: Being the True and Romantic Story of Alexander Hamilton* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1902), p.33.

³⁸ Elizabeth von Arnim, *Elizabeth and her German Garden* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1906), pp.52-3.

³⁹ Mrs Humphry Ward, *Diana Mallory* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1908), p.14.

⁴⁰ Isabelle Brasme, "A caricature of his own voice": Ford and Self-Editing in *Parade's End*, in *Ford Madox Ford, Modernist Magazines and Editing*, ed. by Jason Harding (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), pp.243-52 (p.244).

but the effect of the punctuation in the first scene between Anna and her stepson visually furthers the notion of wordless harmony existing between them.

Anna and Owen's capacity for sparing yet nuanced communication is evident in their first exchange in the narrative. The topic is Owen's engagement to Sophy. Anna seeks a conversation with Owen because George will be joining them and it is their 'last day alone together' (p.105). Owen assumes that she will try to persuade him to give up Sophy. Her opening "Owen—" is met with his "Look here, my dear, it's no sort of use" (p.105). She wants to know what is of no use, and he answers, "Anything on earth you can any of you say"; she soon rejoins with a "You don't in the least know what I can say—or what I mean to", and he asks, "Don't I, generally?" (p.105). She 'gave him this point', but follows up with, "Yes; but this is particularly. I want to say . . . Owen, you've been admirable all through" (p.105). While Owen does not in truth know what Anna is about to tell him, their fast-paced exchange, filled with gaps and omissions, speaks of easy familiarity. The meaning of the em dash following her statement of his name is not immediately obvious. It may suggest an interruption, but the narrator states that Owen stops and faces Anna before telling her that she cannot change his mind. Mistakenly, he reads her pause as a hesitation, a moment preceding the communication of bad news, and so may the reader. In reality, she is about to tell him that she has decided to help secure his grandmother's approval of the match with Sophy. The em dash, then, demands the addressee's attention, but also serves a second function, similar to that of the ellipsis that follows Anna's "I want to say . . ."; it invites the listener and reader to provide an interpretation. The ellipsis also appears to signal a change in Anna's thinking, because instead of just saying that she will help to pave the way for Owen, she changes the topic to his recent behaviour. And instead of picking her up on clearly not saying what she had intended to, Owen laughingly accepts the compliment (p.105), and gives Anna time to say what she really wants to. Following Grant-Davie's scales of silence, the silences as depicted by the em dash and ellipsis in this scene are intentional and thus have greater rhetorical strength than incidental silences, lending the speaker influence over the listener.⁴¹ The em dash also creates an active silence that attracts the listener's attention. Owen is quite right when he reminds Anna of their ability to communicate without words: "You and I don't have to say things to talk to each other" (p.108).

Next he enquires about her plans for the future. At first she is unwilling to disclose her situation. Telling him, "[y]ou know as much as I know. I promise you that" (p.108), Anna

⁴¹ Grant-Davie, p.3.

maintains a topical silence by refusing Owen a particular detail and by redirecting him from the truth. He persists in questioning her, until she answers, frowningly: ““You said just now we didn’t need to say things—”” (p.108). Here the em dash indicates Anna’s unwillingness to speak. Her speech is not just skipping a beat, but indicates a choice to remain silent. Her maintenance of another intentional silence during the exchange again seems to point to her position of power, but as Owen has rightly pointed out, they do not need to say things in order to talk. Her ‘awfully conversational eyes’ have told him the truth: ““Don’t you suppose they told me long ago why it’s just today you’ve made up your mind that people have got to live their own lives—even at Givré?”” (p.108). The reader is never told exactly why Anna has determined to support Owen. The text later implies that it is due to her decision to marry George (p.117), but by withholding absolute certainty Wharton emphasises the exclusivity of the connection between Anna and Owen while she establishes Anna’s dominant position in their relationship – a dominance that is reinforced by the weight of her point of view in the novel.

A second scene that exemplifies Wharton’s use of rhetorical silences occurs near the end of the novel. On the verge of leaving Givré, Sophy has a revealing conversation with Anna. This scene does not appear in the original holograph manuscript – that sees the narrative jump from Anna learning that George and Sophy knew each other in Paris to a Chapter XVII wherein she wakes up in a pre-dawn world where the ‘intense silence of a muffled sky hung in the woods & fields’ – and must have been a later addition.⁴² In the published novel, Anna is aware that George and Sophy had spent time together in Paris, but remains unsure of the true nature of their former relationship. She speculates that Sophy has ended her engagement to Owen because she is in love with another man, but when Sophy confirms that that is the case, Anna stands ‘motionless, silenced by the shock of the avowal’ (p.261). Her initial, involuntary silence implies that she did not think it a real possibility and this, following Grant-Davie’s argument that voluntary silences have greater effect than involuntary ones, suggests that her dominant position is slipping away.⁴³ As her compassion blends with ‘less generous and more obscure’ feelings, she is unable to express herself; Sophy, too, remains unspeaking (p.261). This ensuing silence is active and the main focal point, instead of being a passive backdrop for something else; in contrast to Anna’s, Sophy’s silence is voluntary and thus more effectual. She may be compromised by the truth, but the power balance has shifted and she is in control of the scene.⁴⁴ This transfer of power is most evident when Sophy makes to leave and Anna cries out: ““Oh—” [...]. “Not like this—you mustn’t! I feel—

⁴² *The Reef* corrected holograph manuscript (incomplete). Series I, Box 11, Folder 320.

⁴³ Grant-Davie, p.3.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.3-4.

you make me feel too horribly; as if I were driving you away . . .” (p.261). The em dash signifies Anna’s distress, while the two en dashes and the ellipsis, appear to be incidental or absent-minded silences, rather than significant, intentional ones as Anna grasps for the right words. Finally, after Sophy has broken down, ‘cried silently, continuously, abundantly, as though Anna’s touch had released the waters of some deep spring of pain’ (p.262), and Anna has asked her whether she still plans to go, ‘Sophy stopped too, with eyes that shrank from her’ (p.263). The sparseness of Anna’s reply, ““Oh—”, does little justice to the import of her realisation. When she hides her face, her body language within the silence that follows that simple utterance demonstrates that reality has finally dawned on her. Before Sophy leaves the room, she pauses to add, ““I wanted it—I chose it. He was good to me—no one ever was so good!”” (p.263). In a novel written entirely from Anna and George’s points of view, this statement serves as Sophy’s manifesto. Its every short but intentional pause, indicated by two en dashes, a full stop and an exclamation mark, represents a silence that emphasises her understanding of what has happened. She and George had had an affair that exploited her vulnerability, but these words make clear that in Sophy’s eyes it was consensual and worth the long-term emotional and social cost of behaving like an ‘awfully modern’ woman who is not sure that she believes in marriage, who ‘is all for self-development and the chance to live one’s life’ (p.69), rather than a lady.⁴⁵

4. Revealing silences

The final aspect of silence that I wish to explore in *The Reef* is how it may, incongruously, reveal information that is hidden, and how this intersects with Wharton’s portrayal of women. Revelations enabled by silences in the novel show that non-speech acts do not always protect secrets. They may be as exposing as uninhibited speech and, in this novel, function as an admission of guilt. The first scene that I focus on is one in which George, Owen and Sophy walk up to the house where Anna is waiting for them on the terrace. Owen has happened upon George and Sophy, who had been talking in private until he came into view. George resists the temptation to invent an excuse for their conversation and selects instead to walk on ‘in silence’ (p.168). He is, however, struck ‘by the fact that Owen Leath and the girl were silent also’ (p.169). What follows serves not only as a direct statement on the prominence of silence in a variety of forms in the novel as a whole, but also as a demonstration of how silence may speak volumes:

Silence may be as variously shaded as speech; and that which enfolded Darrow and his two companions seemed to his watchful perceptions to be quivering with cross-threads of communication. At first he was aware only of those that centred in his own troubled consciousness; then it occurred to him that an equal activity of intercourse was going on outside it. Something was in fact passing

⁴⁵ Kassanoff, p.91.

mutely and rapidly between young Leath and Sophy Viner; but what it was, and whither it tended, Darrow, when they reached the house, was but just beginning to divine... (p.169).

George's intuition is impeccable; his sense of a wordless communication between Owen and Sophy takes him straight to the realisation that they are in a relationship. Far from hiding their connection, their silence reveals it.

Anna too will, in due course, reach an important insight connected to this incident. Watching them, it seems to her 'part of the deep intimacy of the scene that they [George and Owen] should not be talking to each other, and it did not till afterward strike her as odd that neither of them apparently felt it necessary to address a word to Sophy Viner' (p.169). Like George, Anna understands the communicative value of silence, grasps that their not-speaking is meaningful, but not quite why. She interprets their silence as indicating a state of harmony, similar to what exists between herself and Owen, when what it denotes is tension. Any accord that might have existed between George and Owen is compromised by a shared wariness that the other might discover his secret involving a concealed relationship. Reading the bonds between Anna, Owen and George as an erotic triangle, the fear that Owen might discover George's concealed affair with Sophy, and that George might discover Owen's engagement to her, heightens the underlying male rivalry for Anna's affection in this scene. Indeed, for Sedgwick, a salient feature of the erotic triangle is that 'the bond that links the two rivals is as intent and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved'.⁴⁶ Later in the novel, Owen's realisation that they have both also been involved with Sophy complicates, but also strengthens, the bond between George and Owen. The younger man now appears to live George's ideal life, having access to both Anna's and Sophy's love. Following Sedgwick's argument, an even more fraught male homosocial bond existed between two central figures in Wharton's own life: James and Fullerton vying for her affection against a backdrop of homoerotic desire.⁴⁷ In the moment that Anna sees the three of them coming towards her, the narrator suggests that she will return to this scene when she knows the truth about George and Sophy's former connection and will realise that the silence which she witnessed then had signaled more than a state of intimacy between the two men.

Finally, Owen himself observes and reads the silences between George and Sophy, 'the first evening she came, in the study; the next morning, early, in the park; yesterday, again, in the springhouse' (p.227). Anna argues that he makes it 'a grievance that two people who are

⁴⁶ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), p.21.

⁴⁷ John R. Bradley, 'Henry James' Permanent Adolescence', in *Henry James and Homo-Erotic Desire*, ed. by John R. Bradley (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), pp.45-68 (p.60); Erlich, p.90.

staying in the same house should be seen talking together', but for Owen this is not the point: "“They were not talking. That’s the point –”" (p.229). Owen may not know the details of their relationship, but their silence alerts him to its existence and by the end of the novel his own silence, "“the things he didn’t say”", is enough to tell Anna that he has gathered the full truth about it (p.325). Male and female characters in *The Reef* seem equally attuned to the revelatory power of silence; I read Wharton’s portrayal of the ability of male and female characters to see through silences, to guess correctly at their underlying reasons, as undifferentiated and as placing the two genders – both remarkably attentive to that which is not said – on an equal footing.

The women of *The Reef* wield considerable influence by themselves maintaining and occasionally breaking silences. The power of silence has already been demonstrated by the analysis of Anna and Owen’s opening conversation and Anna and Sophy’s final confrontation at Givré, where Sophy reveals the whole truth to Anna. Conversely, by refusing to give George an answer on the evening before his departure from Givré, by staying silent, Anna delays a final resolution of their crisis in a way that is reminiscent of Stout’s suggestion that female writers may employ silence to subvert male power. He insists on knowing whether she will stay with him: "“Tonight, dearest, I must have my answer”" (p.310). But she changes the subject, asks him further questions about his history with Sophy, and while she does '[sign] a faint assent' (p.311) the uncertainty remains until, when they part, he is the one who pleads for her silence: "“Not to-night – don’t tell me to-night!”" (p.314). Despite being the victim of George’s past choices, Anna possesses momentary power within the relationship, as expressed through her resistance to speak the words that will end it all. In this she is comparable to *Ethan Frome*’s Mrs Hale whose refusal to speak provokes the narrator’s investigations into the past.

In *The Reef* Wharton indicts the victimisation and exploitation of women, and interrogates the silences that are imposed upon them by society, especially through Anna’s characterisation and juxtaposed with young Sophy. Her treatment of these issues further invites readers to consider the differences between George’s professional silences and the 'amateur' silences of other characters in the text. He draws on his well-honed diplomatic skills, they on a combination of interpersonal instincts and drawing-room conventions. This text also lends itself to an examination of rhetorical silences and of what such gaps and omissions signify; the scene between Anna and Owen certainly uses them to establish her dominance. Yet that authority is lost in the scene analysed between the two women. However, even as power transfers from Anna to Sophy, female exploitation and victimisation remains a central theme of the novel – something that Anna emphasises in an

earlier incarnation of the text. When George characterises his affair with Sophy as ‘a moment’s folly... a flash of madness’, Anna rejoins sharply with ““You sufficiently describe her in saying that!”” (p.268), but the revised holograph manuscript shows Wharton inserting this remark, having originally drafted and then struck out the unfinished line, ““You deserted the girl’.⁴⁸ Finally, the revelations achieved by silences empower Wharton’s female characters to the same degree as male characters; her writing is wedded too closely to the real-world circumstances and considerations of women for a more dramatic departure from fact. Taken together, *The Reef* reinforces the novelist’s longstanding interest in the variable features and functions of silences, an exploration that is resumed and re-contextualised as she moves her magnifying glass from the home to the Western Front in her principal account of the Great War, *Fighting France*.

II. SILENCE AND THE WESTERN FRONT: *FIGHTING FRANCE*

1. Introduction

Wharton’s relationship with silence during the Great War was multi-faceted. This discussion positions her in Paris in 1914 and draws attention to her admiration of what she experienced, or at least reported, as the quiet stoicism with which the French greeted the news of war. Then it turns to Wharton’s advocacy for American entry to the war and against Prussian militarism, despite her enduring appreciation of German culture. She spoke out to end American isolationism, often by emphasising the dangers posed to western civilisation by the Central Powers. The outbreak of the conflict also galvanised quick reaction by Paris’ broader American community, including a number of notable women, while it created an opportunity for women to move outside the traditional female sphere. I discuss some of the roles performed by women at the front, sometimes before civilian men were allowed to do their part, to show how the war broadened possibilities for women (and began to generate written first-hand accounts of the front), but also to contextualise Wharton’s own involvement in the war. Wharton did not toe the line of neutrality required both by politicians and the reading public in her country of birth prior to 1917. However, despite her vocal and earnest belief in the war, she was more subdued in her portrayals of the realities of warfare, especially of its effect on the human body. This comparative muteness has attracted criticism from a number of commentators but may, as I argue, have been overemphasised. Official war rhetoric put a brave face on the Allied cause and wielded tight control over details released to the public; literary accounts, with some notable exceptions, took years to reflect the full horror of life in the trenches. Wharton was exhilarated by her access to the frontlines and the chance to provide eyewitness accounts of what she encountered but, once

⁴⁸ *The Reef* revised, corrected holograph manuscript (incomplete). Series I, Box 11, Folder 324.

there, she could not avoid seeing the true costs of the conflict, such as the loss of human life, whether French or German. She was also well aware of the war's growing refugee population in Paris and elsewhere. I consider how much focus on the human body in war one could expect in her writing, taking into account her desire to encourage American involvement in the war, the demands of her publishers and readers, and restrictions imposed at official level. What she did not witness directly was active conflict or the contrasting interplay of noise and silence experienced by long-term occupants of the trench landscape. There were some silences that Wharton broke with vigour, some that she broke a little, and others that she maintained, resulting in *Fighting France*'s modulated treatment of the human body. Lastly this part of Chapter 3 considers something that Wharton discloses without hesitation: her frequent confusion over what she witnessed, or was meant to witness. This uncertainty, among other features of *Fighting France*, turns what might have been pure propaganda into advocacy and reportage. Her willingness to speak of her lack of understanding and inability to translate the culture of war fully result, to borrow from Kapuściński, in literature by foot.

2. Reacting to war

2.1. *The Great War and French stoicism*

A number of developments punctuated the history of aurality during the early twentieth century. They included, according to Tom Vandevelde, the increasing spread and popularity of new audio technologies, such as the telephone, gramophone and radio, and the hum of the internal combustion engine. Notable also was the First World War, with its 'deafening' trenches, and 'its piercing sirens, heavy artillery and planes roaring overhead'.⁴⁹ However, there nestled within this explosion of sound a variety of silences, not least of which involved shellfire damage to telephone lines that cut off communication between those at the front lines and their commanders, forcing a return to the rather more primitive technology of the human runner.⁵⁰ Other silences included failures to recognise the potential duration of the war, toll on human life, and disruption of normal life and, as these truths came to light, a resistance to disclosing them publicly. Wharton's noticeable preoccupation with silent stoicism in her early writing about the Great War reflects this overconfident silence. Based in Paris when the war broke out, she noted in *Fighting France*'s opening chapter the city's 'self-imposed serenity' and felt 'something nobly conscious and voluntary in the mood of [...] [its] quiet multitude' in 1914 (p.9). She portrayed Paris as preparing for war with a

⁴⁹ Tom Vandevelde, "'Are You Going to Mind the Noise?': Mapping the Soundscape of *Parade's End*", *International Ford Madox Ford Studies*, 13 (2014), 53-66 (pp.53, 55).

⁵⁰ Sara Haslam, "'The moaning of the world" and the "words that bring me peace": Modernism and the First World War', in *The Edinburgh Companion to British and American War Literature*, ed. by Adam Piette and Mark Rawlinson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), pp.47-57 (p.51).

‘kind of smiling fatalism’; ‘[w]ar, the shrieking fury, had announced herself by a great wave of stillness’ that eventually silenced even the newsboys (pp.12-3). She approvingly observed that ‘self-restraint was the notable characteristic of this people’ (p.13). Wharton’s portrayal of the French reception of the war appears to contrast with the attitude of the British, long accepted as one of mass enthusiasm and noisy jingoism. Adrian Gregory offered a critical examination of the British response that outlined the motivations of various stakeholders to create and perpetuate the idea ‘that Britain was seized with a desire to wage war’ and questioned the robustness of the evidence upon which this assertion is based; he convincingly debunked the myth of a mass enthusiasm for war in 1914 Britain and traced how widespread reluctance to join the conflict slowly gave way to resignation.⁵¹ Mary Roberts Rinehart’s (1876-1958) account of the war, *Kings, Queens and Pawns: An American Woman at the Front* (1915), offers supporting evidence for a more muted British war when she describes the conduct of couples at Victoria Station in January 1915:

And out on the platform, saying little, because words are so feeble, pacing back and forth slowly, went these silent couples. They did not even touch hands. One felt that all the unselfish stoicism and restraint would crumble under the familiar touch.⁵²

Following her reflections on the attitude in France, Wharton began to visit the French frontlines for a series of articles, which first appeared in *Scribner’s Magazine* in 1915 and eventually became the volume, *Fighting France* (p.xi). In these accounts the pivotal role of Catholic nuns, women who had chosen to withdraw from the noisy, secular world, looking after the wounded in rural villages and towns, features repeatedly.⁵³ In Wharton’s account they are not particularly reserved. Soeur Gabrielle Rosnet ‘puts as much gaiety as wrath into her tale’ and refers to the enemy as ‘*ces satanés Allemands*’ (p.28); Soeur Julie tells ‘with a quiet indignation more thrilling than invective the hideous details of the bloody three days’, but is ‘at present concerned with the task of closing and feeding Gerbéviller’ (p.47): “‘I have directed all the work on our hospice farm myself. All the women are working in the fields – we must take the place of the men’” (p.48). Their bravery and sacrifice also become a theme. They nurse, feed, clothe and protect a steady stream of injured soldiers and civilians in various locations skirting the French frontline (pp.28-9, 47, 52, 66). Wharton continued to comment on the undaunted behaviour of the French during the war years well after they were over. She wrote about the millions of Frenchmen who spent their best years in the trenches, and about similar numbers of ‘uncomplaining, self-denying’ Frenchwomen who

⁵¹ Adrian Gregory, ‘British ‘War Enthusiasm’ in 1914: A Reassessment’, in *Evidence, History and the Great War: Historians and the Impact of 1914-18*, ed. by Gail Braybon (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), pp.67-85 (pp.67-9, 77).

⁵² Mary Roberts Rinehart, *Kings, Queens and Pawns: An American Woman at the Front* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1915), p.10.

⁵³ Also see *ibid.*, p.25.

sent them forth, awaited their return, and mourned their loss ‘silently and unflinchingly’, never to declare that ‘the trial was too bitter to be borne’.⁵⁴

The quiet dignity of a people facing war’s extreme challenges doubtlessly signified a noble strength to Wharton, as indicated by her repeated references to it. Contemporary reviews of *Fighting France* demonstrate the traditionalism of Wharton’s rhetoric and the extent to which that spoke to readers. The *New York Times Book Review* of 5 December 1915 noted approvingly, for example, her portrayal of the ‘calm valor’ and ‘self-restraint’ of the French in general, and the ‘look of quiet authority’ of those fighting in the trenches. It noted too the volume’s message that while ‘the slow months have dragged by, bringing a calamity unheard of in human annals, the white glow of dedication throughout France has not waned’.⁵⁵ It is critical to bear in mind that Wharton’s focus on silent valour and heroism contrasted with that of others, such as Henri Barbusse (1873-1935), whose subversive and influential *Le Feu* (1916) offered an account of war that foregrounds its moral and physical ugliness.⁵⁶ Yet Wharton was not the only contemporary writer to portray the French as silently courageous. Mildred Aldrich (1853-1928), an American newspaper critic in Paris recently retired to a house in the Marne countryside, watched ‘a people silently united’ on their way to war.⁵⁷ Accounts like those of Wharton and Aldrich not only mirrored traditional war rhetoric, but also created and sustained a one-dimensional understanding of the conflict that refused to allow for sensations of doubt, fear or vulnerability among citizens of the Allied nations. The ideological implication of this position was that breaking the silence to express dissent or complaint would signal a lack of courage. It became a yardstick for virtue that encouraged compliance; the contemporary deep admiration of silence in effect also silenced. The *New York Times Book Review* paid tribute to the ‘vast majority [who] hide their despair and seem to say of the great national effort: “Though it slay me, yet I trust in it”’.⁵⁸ Wharton’s portrayal of French resistance to despair not only reflected conservative, Edwardian-era thinking, but also created a sense of shared values and morality. It invited empathy from Anglo-American readers with the objective to provoke action – in this case military – true to the nature of reportage writing.

The silence that Wharton foregrounded paradoxically afforded her the opportunity to speak and to construct the French, and their plight, as she wished them to be perceived by her readers. The representation of silence and stoicism in effect gives voice to the writer, but as

⁵⁴ Wharton, ‘New Frenchwoman’, pp.295-6.

⁵⁵ Tuttleton, Lauer and Murray, p.221.

⁵⁶ Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (London: Pimlico, 1992), pp.203-5.

⁵⁷ Claire M. Tylee, *The Great War and Women’s Consciousness: Images of Militarism and Womanhood in Women’s Writings, 1914-64* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), pp.20-1.

⁵⁸ Tuttleton, Lauer and Murray, pp.221-2.

already indicated, hers was not the only portrayal of 1914's silences. The poet Grace Fallow Norton (1876-1962) was in France when war broke out. She soon returned to New York, but continued to process what she had seen in Europe. Hazel Hutchison noted that her poem, 'The Mobilization in Brittany' (1916) begins with silence:

It was silent in the street.
I did not know until a woman told me,
Sobbing over the muslin she sold me.
Then I went out and walked to the square
And saw a few dazed people standing there.

And it ends with a rhetorical question: 'How long will the others dream and stare?'.⁵⁹ For Hutchison the silence in Norton's poem does not signal stoicism as much as despair connected to a life disrupted by the war and to uncomprehending disbelief.⁶⁰ Fallow Norton's poetry would also be harnessed as propaganda, as discussed later, but her understanding of the French reaction to the war differs from Wharton's, as does her own response, representing an interesting comparative example.

2.2. *Edith Wharton, war propagandist?*

Lucinda Borkett-Jones' recent doctoral thesis neatly summarises the evolution of thinking around the pejorative associations of the term 'propaganda', noting that 'connotations of the term have changed in response to the use of propaganda, particularly by the state, and especially in the context of war' over the past century.⁶¹ For Harold Lasswell, these associations stem from the prominent, official use of propaganda by national governments during the Great War to shape attitudes at home and abroad.⁶² Others have connected them to the role of propaganda in subsequent armed conflicts, notably the Second World and Vietnam Wars.⁶³ During the Great War, American support was highly sought by both the Allies and Central Powers. When war broke out, Germany's propaganda agency in America was in position and ready to advance its case. Britain first countered German efforts with its own propaganda offensive to persuade neutral countries of its cause and then embarked on persuading the United States in particular to join the Allies.⁶⁴ Peter Buitenhuis offered a helpful account of the involvement of writers, driven by a sense of patriotic duty, moral conviction, and financial need, in official and unofficial propaganda during the war. In this light Wharton's fervently positive portrayal of the French during the war, as well as her

⁵⁹ Hazel Hutchison, *The War That Used Up Words: American Writers and the First World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), pp.54-5.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.55.

⁶¹ Lucinda Carys Borkett-Jones, 'Ford Madox Ford's Anglo-German Ambivalence: Authoring Propaganda and Negotiating Nationalism as a Literary Cosmopolitan' (PhD thesis, The Open University, 2019), p.32.

⁶² Harold D. Lasswell, 'Foreword', in George G. Bruntz, *Allied Propaganda and the Collapse of the German Empire in 1918* (Stanford University: Stanford University Press, 1938), pp.v-viii (p.vii).

⁶³ Borkett-Jones, p.32.

⁶⁴ Peter Buitenhuis, *The Great War of Words: British, American and Canadian Propaganda and Fiction, 1914-1933* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987), pp.12, 16, 54

relentless insistence on American involvement, warrant closer examination. Unlike the group of writers – including J.M. Barrie (1860-1937), Conan Doyle, Hardy and Kipling (although Kipling could not attend) – who had been summoned by Britain’s newly established War Propaganda Bureau to attend a meeting at Wellington House on 2 September 1914 and requested to write official pro-war propaganda, Wharton was never asked formally to write propaganda or to declare her support for the war by the British, French or American governments. Nor was she one of the four women, including her friend Mrs Humphry Ward and May Sinclair, who signed the resulting Authors’ Declaration that appeared in both *The Times* and the *New York Times* on behalf of the Allied cause.⁶⁵

By 1914 Wharton had established herself as a successful professional writer and had been living in France for four years – France, whose life and culture were worshipped by a host of Anglo-American writers alongside herself, including James, Conrad, Kipling, Ford and Conan Doyle.⁶⁶ Tóibín described Wharton’s and James’ writerly imaginations as ‘nourished by France’, suggesting even that Wharton had been rescued by Paris as her marriage to Teddy collapsed and as she began to relinquish her American life.⁶⁷ The significance of her adopted country on a personal level, her social class – reflected by her faith in the morality of supporting the war effort and indeed her war relief activities – and her citizenship of a neutral country were factors that placed Wharton in a unique position as champion for France. William Blazek speculated that Wharton might have felt obliged to come France’s defence during the war, in part by the privacy that its legal system had afforded her following her divorce. He also mentioned her commitment to being a cosmopolitan who ‘purposely and productively used the advantages of international travel and wide learning’, instead of a fashionable one who was happy to welcome new ideas without understanding them.⁶⁸ Her pride in being ‘culturally productive’ in this sense also may have fueled her war work. Commentators like Price, and more recently Kelly, have observed that Wharton’s war writing has often been dismissed as propaganda, but she herself seemed comfortable with this characterisation, possibly because it had not yet accumulated its contemporary, troubling meaning.⁶⁹ Even in 1918, when *Cosmopolitan* asked her to write a series of articles like one on French culture that had appeared in *Scribner’s Magazine*, Wharton drolly told the Garretts that ‘as people will think it will be good proppergander [sic] I’m buckling down to the task’.⁷⁰ I prefer to characterise Wharton as an informal advocate rather than

⁶⁵ Hynes, pp.26-7.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p.1.

⁶⁷ Colm Tóibín, ‘Foreword’, in Edith Wharton, *Fighting France: From Dunkerque to Belfort* (London: Hesperus Press, 2010), pp.vii-xiii (pp.vii, ix, xi).

⁶⁸ William Blazek, ‘Wharton and France’, in *Edith Wharton in Context*, ed. by Laura Rattray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp.275-84 (pp.277-8).

⁶⁹ Kelly, ‘Introduction’, p.1; Price, p.xii.

⁷⁰ Olin-Ammentorp, *Edith Wharton, Willa Cather*, pp.214-5; also see Price, p.148.

propagandist for the Allied cause. She recorded her visits to the front with a pro-French agenda, but did so in an unofficial capacity. She also expressed her certainties alongside her uncertainties about the war to provide a more nuanced portrayal than might be expected from pure propaganda.

Wharton's Francophilia left her appalled at America's neutral position under Woodrow Wilson (*EW*, p.452). This was a reaction shared by her friend Teddy Roosevelt; their correspondence dating to 1915 repeatedly mentions the war, with him declaring on occasion that 'until we [the American nation] understand that war and death are preferable to certain kinds of peace and of life, we shall cut but a poor figure in the world'.⁷¹ In his introduction to her edited volume, *The Book of the Homeless* (1916), Roosevelt reminded Americans of the duty that 'the neutral nations of the civilized world [...] have so shamefully failed to perform'.⁷² Channeling all her energy into supporting her adopted country during its war effort, Wharton's activities in 1915 alone included

(besides her editing and writing) the administration of American Hostels for Refugees; the founding of a workroom, an employment agency, an orphanage, a free clinic and day nursery; and the establishment of various fund-raising committees, as well as tours of front-line hospital units on behalf of the Red Cross [resulting in *Fighting France*].⁷³

It is revealing to compare her work with that of another expatriate member of her own intellectual network, the writer, actress, feminist, and long-time friend of James, Elizabeth Robins (1862-1952). Robins spent the first year of the war working in Endell Street Military Hospital, London, an institution managed by women and dedicated to the care of servicemen. A steady programme of speaking engagements, hospital visits and fundraising events followed.⁷⁴ Concerned by female unemployment in England during the early months of the war, Robins' public speaking and writing addressed war service for women. After America joined the war, she was 'beyond words glad', feeling that 'a great burden has rolled off me'.⁷⁵ Carrying the same burden, Wharton focused her writing during the early years of the war on persuading the United States to join the Allied cause.

Patrick Quinn observed that most Americans approved of the United States' neutrality. American writers, however, emphasised not only German barbarity, desire and preparedness for war, but the threat these characteristics posed to the United States itself. Efforts to

⁷¹ Roosevelt to Wharton, 23 June 1915. Series II, Box 30, Folder 919.

⁷² Theodore Roosevelt, 'Introduction' in *The Book of the Homeless* (*Le Livre des Sans-Foyer*), ed. by Edith Wharton (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), pp.ix-x (p.x).

⁷³ Claire M. Tylee, 'Imagining Women at War: Feminist Strategies in Edith Wharton's War Writing', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 16 (1997), 327-43 (p.337).

⁷⁴ Joanne E. Gates, 'Stitches in a Critical Time: The Diaries of Elizabeth Robins, American Feminist in England, 1907-1924', *A/B: Auto/Biography Studies*, 4 (1988), 130-9 (p.137).

⁷⁵ Angela V. John, *Elizabeth Robins: Staging a Life 1862-1952* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp.202-3.

demonise Germany were so successful that when America finally did enter the war, the decision was met with relief.⁷⁶ Hutchison outlined what Americans sympathetic to the Allied cause were up against. Members of the East Coast middle classes, those with a college education, and those with British, French and Italian family ties campaigned for financial and military support and volunteered for military and humanitarian service. At the same time, in 1914 fifteen million Americans were of German descent, nine million viewed German as their first language, and thousands of German-Americans volunteered to serve with the Central Powers. This helps to explain the protracted debate over neutrality that raged in the American press and academic and literary circles until the United States entered the war.⁷⁷ The latter came too late for James who, despairing over his birth-country's failure to support Britain during the war, renounced his citizenship to become a British subject in 1915. Benstock, among others, noted that he failed to mention the matter in a letter to Wharton dated 26 July, the day when he swore allegiance to the British Crown; they would never speak about it (*EW*, p.259; *NG*, p.320).⁷⁸ She did not approve of his action when she learnt of it, but came to understand his decision: 'His change of citizenship was the revolt of a sensitive conscience bred in the old ideals, and outraged by the divergence between act and utterance which has come to be a matter of course for the new American' (*NG*, p.320).

2.3. *Anglo-American women and the Great War*

Various prominent American writers in France attempted to create awareness of the situation in Europe and to tilt the debate towards American participation. Of particular interest here are the women who threw their weight behind the war effort in a variety of ways, including Wharton who was one of only a few civilian women on the Western Front not involved in nursing duties; Gertrude Stein (1874-1946) who acquired and then used her Ford motorcar as a delivery vehicle for medical supplies; Aldrich who published her memoir of life at the front during the First Battle of the Marne in 1914; wealthy Chicago heiress and novelist Mary Borden (1886-1968) who ran a field hospital for the French army; and the nurse Ellen La Motte (1873-1961) who published her accounts of working in Borden's hospital.⁷⁹ Fallow Norton witnessed the war far more briefly and from a greater distance, yet expressed her reactions in powerful words that were mobilised by the campaign for military intervention.⁸⁰ American involvement in the war was called for openly by a series of poems in her anthology, *What Is Your Legion* (1916). Houghton Mifflin accepted the publication

⁷⁶ Patrick Quinn, 'The First World War: American Writing', in *The Cambridge Companion to War Writing*, ed. by Kate McLoughlin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp.175-84 (pp.175-6, 178).

⁷⁷ Hutchison, pp.6-7.

⁷⁸ Powers, pp.292, 346-8.

⁷⁹ Hutchison, pp.1, 9-10; Sara Prieto, 'Without methods': Three Female Authors Visiting the Western Front', *First World War Studies*, 6 (2015), 171-85 (p.173).

⁸⁰ Hutchison, pp.56, 59, 66.

‘both on poetic and patriotic grounds’ and Elizabeth Stillman Chamberlain, married to a professor at Columbia, backed the project ‘against any losses to the publisher’.⁸¹

These American women stood in contrast to upper-class expatriates who, to Wharton’s mind, endorsed the Allied war effort as they exploited it. Hutchison remarked that Wharton was especially acerbic about high-society volunteers who appeared to be enjoying themselves more than they were contributing.⁸² In *A Backward Glance* Wharton specifically recalls ‘one rich compatriot, long established in Paris’, whose plans to manage the clothes distribution department of the *Accueil Franco-Américaine* ‘enchanted’ her; unfortunately she ‘came for about a week, increased the confusion she had offered to dispel – and then disappeared’ (*ABG*, pp.347-8). In a letter to Mary Berenson, quoted by Price, she comments on ‘the curiosity of high society ladies at the front’: ‘I don’t know anything that horrifies me more than the mixture of flirtation and surgery, of opoponax [perfume] and chloroform’.⁸³ I return later to Wharton’s exasperation over the difficulty of securing a pass to the front, apparently due to the misbehavior of upper-class civilian women, as well as her sometimes biting fictional portrayals of volunteers. Yet there is no denying the significant contribution by others, even when they also found fulfillment in the process. The drive for such fulfillment is a key consideration in Teresa Gómez Reus’ account of largely upper- and middle-class women who, lacking Wharton’s privileged access, served in the Belgium war zone as reporters and field ambulance drivers and who, with the aid of the motorcar, ‘circumvented the obstacles placed in their way by the military hierarchy and found a means to exchange the role of bystander for the prospect of mobility, adventure and heroism – all traditionally viewed as male preserves’.⁸⁴

Freedom of movement and freedom of speech were some of the first war casualties, as Gómez Reus put it, as officially accredited journalists were barred from the battle ground in France and Belgium and check points and permits inhibited the free flow of vehicles. Philip Gibbs (1877-1962) was one of only a handful of journalists selected by the government as official war correspondents with the British Army, but did not obtain full credentials until June 1915. By the end of that year the benefit of civilian support to troops began to be recognised and Gibbs was given freer rein by the censor, although the true horror of the situation was still omitted from accounts.⁸⁵ Female journalists, like Fryn Tennyson Jesse

⁸¹ Ibid., pp.133-4.

⁸² Ibid., p.41.

⁸³ Price, p.43.

⁸⁴ Teresa Gómez Reus, ‘Racing to the Front: Auto-mobility and Competing Narratives of Women in the First World War’, in *Women in Transit Through Literary Liminal Spaces*, ed. by Teresa Gómez Reus and Terry Gifford (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp.107-22 (p.108).

⁸⁵ Tylee, *The Great War*, p.19.

(1888-1958) on behalf of the British *Daily Mail* and Rinehart of the American *Saturday Evening Post*, were somehow allowed into the fray earlier than that.⁸⁶ Tennyson Jesse persuaded the *Daily Mail* to support her visits to the front by threatening to go with or without its assistance; having dispatched her to Belgium with forty pounds in sovereigns and a hold-all, the paper claimed her as its 'star War Correspondent' with headlines such as 'Girl in the Firing Line – The Advantage of Being Small' and 'A Woman among the War Ruins – Roses and Desolation'.⁸⁷ Tennyson Jesse's war reports were also published by *The Pall Mall Gazette*, *The English Review* and *The Tatler*.⁸⁸

In *Kings, Queens and Pawns: For King and Country*, Rinehart describes herself as 'a refugee, fleeing and hiding from the stern eyes of Lord Kitchener and the British War Office' in order to reach Calais.⁸⁹ Her passage was arranged through the Belgian Red Cross in London, and smoothed by pure chance. Travelling from New York to Liverpool on the *RMS Franconia* she had encountered a certain Mr. Humphries, a British barrister, whose wife suggested when they met in London that Rinehart approach the representatives of the Belgian Red Cross who were, at the time, stationed at the Savoy Hotel. Arriving at the Savoy, searching for Belgians, she came across Dr. Antoine Depage, a member of the executive committee of the Belgian Red Cross who happened to be attending a conference at the hotel, as well as surgeon to the King of Belgium.⁹⁰ Dr. Depage grasped American desire to know how its financial aid was employed in Northern France where it was 'swallowed up in great silence' (p.15), and Rinehart's purpose 'to judge and report conditions' in field hospitals at or near the front and supplied by the American Red Cross.⁹¹ He approved her request. Rinehart

meant to get, if it was possible, a picture of this new warfare that would show it for the horror that it is; a picture that would give pause to that certain percentage of the American people that is always so eager to force a conservative government into conflict with other nations.⁹²

Having obtained such a picture, she argued that 'humanely, it was time to make to America an authoritative statement as to conditions in Belgium', that while the German-American population had 'constantly' pleaded its case, 'Belgium had made no complaint' and 'the English and French authorities during the first year of the war had preserved a dignified silence'.⁹³ Indeed, she described England's silence in this regard as 'a vital mistake'.⁹⁴ In

⁸⁶ Gómez Reus, p.109-10.

⁸⁷ Joanna Colenbrander, *A Portrait of Fryn: A Biography of F. Tennyson Jesse* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1984), pp.81-2.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.83-4.

⁸⁹ Rinehart, p.27.

⁹⁰ Ed Klewowski and Libby Klewowski, *Edith Wharton and Mary Roberts Rinehart at the Western Front, 1915* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2018), p.17.

⁹¹ Rinehart, pp.12-3, 15.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p.13.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp.60-1.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.61.

contrast to Wharton, Rinehart accepted that ‘the [American] principle of non-interference in European politics is one of national policy and not to be questioned’, but like her felt strongly that America should not have been kept ignorant of the Allied nations’ plight, that the silence surrounding the latter had to be broken.⁹⁵

Despite their proximity to battlefields, women like Rinehart, Tennyson Jesse and Wharton remained observers, in contrast to members of the Motor (or Flying) Ambulance Corps, founded by the Scottish doctor, Hector Munro. Munro recruited a handful of young British and American women from diverse social backgrounds, based primarily on their driving rather than nursing skills. The British writer May Sinclair was allowed briefly to join and report on their activities. Her *Journal of Impressions in Belgium* (1915) revealed a world dependent on the motorcar, expanding horizons and promising glory, but also of intense female competition to do good, and to be recognised as doing good.⁹⁶ Another contemporary writer who openly acknowledged the potential of the war to promote individuals, was La Motte. Her *The Backwash of War* (1916) drew attention to the presence of ‘sightseers’ at the front. *The Backwash* was dedicated to Borden whose volunteer military hospital, L’Hôpital Chirurgical Mobil No. 1 in Belgium, La Motte joined in 1915.⁹⁷ La Motte, a graduate of the Johns Hopkins Hospital Training School for Nurses, was one of a number of alumni from that institution as well as the Johns Hopkins University’s School of Medicine who volunteered at the American Ambulance, ‘organized in 1914 by a Parisian colony of wealthy Americans’, including Borden.⁹⁸ In a sketch entitled ‘La Patrie Reconnaissante’, La Motte’s Parisian taxi driver, Marius, suffering from gas gangrene, accuses his (male) ambulance drivers of being “Strangers! Sightseers!”. He demands to know “[w]hat are they here for – France?”, only to conclude that they are there only for themselves, to “[...] write a book – to say what they have done – when it was safe!”.⁹⁹ Here La Motte turns her critique of war as a stage for terrible suffering, but also for self-fulfillment and self-promotion, upon herself, another volunteer who would eventually leave the front, write a book and say what she has done.¹⁰⁰ Some writers openly celebrated the opportunities offered to women by the war, like Gertrude Atherton in *The Living Present* (1917), while others were more constrained. In *A Hilltop on the Marne* (1914), Aldrich acknowledges her excitement over the war and

⁹⁵ Ibid., p.60.

⁹⁶ Gómez Reus, pp.111-4, 116.

⁹⁷ Alice Kelly, ‘The American Friends: Nurse, Suffragette, War Writer: Ellen N. La Motte’s Life in Letters’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 31 March 2017, 17-9 (p.19).

⁹⁸ Anon., ‘Ambulances Americaine’, Johns Hopkins University, n.d. <<http://exhibits.library.jhu.edu/exhibits/show/hopkins-and-the-great-war/johns-hopkins-hospital/neutral-interventions/ambulance-america>> [accessed 7 December 2017]; Anon., ‘Ellen La Motte’, Johns Hopkins University, n.d. <<http://exhibits.library.jhu.edu/exhibits/show/hopkins-and-the-great-war/johns-hopkins-hospital/neutral-interventions/ellen-la-motte>> [accessed 7 December 2017].

⁹⁹ Ellen N. La Motte, ‘La Patrie Reconnaissante’, in *The Backwash of War: The Human Wreckage of the Battlefield as Witnessed by an American Hospital Nurse* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1916), pp.17-32 (p.21).

¹⁰⁰ Hutchison, p.154.

observes how it has replaced her search for a refuge in old age with a sense of rejuvenation.¹⁰¹

Writers like Sinclair, Aldrich and La Motte revealed the moral complexities of war for women. *The Backwash* was not printed in England or France, but went into a number of impressions in America until its banning in mid-1918.¹⁰² Yet La Motte's subversive perspective, along with works such as Sinclair's *Journal*, maintained awareness and attracted particular interest because of their subject matter and the fact that they were written by women who had gained direct experience of the war. They represented sought-after news offered by unexpected voices. Gómez Reus noted that the scarcity of news from the front due to military restrictions meant that demand for first-hand accounts soared, but also that the press was particularly attentive to news about and/or written by women at the front.¹⁰³ Women writers were able to say things about the war that men were prohibited from saying because their experiences were uniquely gendered, and because those wishing to suppress news about the war failed to realise that they needed to be censored. Rinehart was astonished by her ability to write down 'carefully and openly everything' she saw at the front; never without her notebooks, she described herself as being 'almost aggressively a writer'.¹⁰⁴ In Dunkirk she stayed around the corner from a house that had been closed by police for a month because 'a room had been rented to a correspondent. The correspondent had been sentenced to five years' imprisonment'.¹⁰⁵ Yet she never met any resistance. Finally, women's accounts did not exist in isolation, but formed part of a larger, published narrative; they were complemented, for example, by appeals published in 1914 and 1915 in American journals for financial support to the American Volunteer Motor-Ambulance Corps in France by its chairman, James.¹⁰⁶

2.4. Contesting Prussian militarism

Buitenhuis' account of the concerted, bidden efforts of older, established literary figures in America, Britain and Canada to promote the Allied cause, makes clear that anti-German and pro-war propaganda was for the benefit of a wide audience.¹⁰⁷ They wrote on behalf of 'good', as represented by the French, 'the most urbane and civilized people in the history of

¹⁰¹ Dorothy Goldman, 'Eagles of the West'? American Women Writers and World War I', in *Women and World War I: The Written Response*, ed. by Dorothy Goldman (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993), pp.188-208 (pp.193-4); Tylee, *The Great War*, pp.20-1.

¹⁰² Tylee, *The Great War*, pp.93-4.

¹⁰³ Gómez Reus, p.110.

¹⁰⁴ Rinehart, p.17.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Henry James, 'The American Volunteer Motor-Ambulance Corps in France', in *Henry James on Culture: Collected Essays on Politics and the American Social Scene*, ed. by Pierre A. Walker (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), pp.131-7; Preston Lockwood, 'Henry James' First Interview', in *Henry James on Culture: Collected Essays on Politics and the American Social Scene*, ed. by Pierre A. Walker (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), pp.138-45.

¹⁰⁷ Buitenhuis, p.xiii.

the world, [...] defending their ancient homeland from enslavement' by 'evil', the Prussian imperialists, 'the Huns of ancient memory, [who] left behind them in invaded territories a trail of ruins, blood and terror, murder and rapine'.¹⁰⁸ Wharton contributed to the narrative of a barbaric Germany, opposing the potential imposition of its culture onto that of her beloved France, or England or Italy. In September 1914 she wrote to Sara Norton that the "atrocities" one hears of *are true*, and described the conflict as a 'hideous flood of savagery' (*LEW*, p.335). Her violent reaction against the Germany of Allied propaganda, which she herself helped to establish and sustain, is fathomable, but commentators have also characterised her position as resisting the modern age. Lee explained that the destruction by fire of the library at Louvain, along with its medieval treasures, on 25 August 1914, became a symbol of Prussian barbarism and its intention to destroy western civilization (*EW*, p.449). Defending France meant saving western society from an invasion by brutes who thought nothing of erasing history itself, but also against 'the invasion of materialism, vulgarity, class upheaval, national and personal self-interest – all of what Wharton considered the ugliness of modern life'.¹⁰⁹ Defending France meant defending 'conservative virtues'.¹¹⁰ For Price, Wharton 'wrote at the top of her voice during the early war years', adding that both she and James 'were swept uncritically into a total and totalizing condemnation of Germany'; 'in German *kultur* they foresaw the "crash of civilization"'.¹¹¹ Wharton's condemnation came swiftly – and loudly.

Wharton declares sweepingly in *Fighting France* that the 'French hate militarism'; she herself views it as 'stupid, inartistic, unimaginative and enslaving' and understandably detested by the French (p.110). The German *kultur* that she rejected was that of Prussian imperialism and militarism, of Germany as contemporary nation state, a commonly drawn distinction at the time.¹¹² Nineteenth-century concerns over Prussian militarism were first raised when the German Empire of Wilhelm 1 was created in 1871, under the leadership of Prussian Prime Minister Otto von Bismarck and following successful military campaigns against Denmark (1864), Austria (1866) and France (1870-1871) to unite the German states. John Morrow attributed the emergence of the so-called 'German problem' to the 'unexpected and rapid appearance of this new industrial and military power in central Europe' and its potential to destabilise the existing power balance.¹¹³ Seemingly

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.xvi.

¹⁰⁹ John T. Matthews, 'American Writing of the Great War', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the First World War*, ed. by Vincent Sherry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp.217-42 (p.224).

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.226.

¹¹¹ Price, p.xiii.

¹¹² William Blazek, 'French Lessons: Edith Wharton's War Propaganda', *Revue Française d'Études Américaines*, 115 (2008), 10-22 (p.18); Price, p.21; Shafquat Towheed, 'Reading the Great War: An Examination of Edith Wharton's Reading and Responses, 1914-1918', in *Reading and the First World War: Readers, Texts, Archives*, ed. by Shafquat Towheed and Edmund G.C. King (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp.78-95 (p.89).

¹¹³ John H. Morrow Jr, *The Great War: An Imperial History* (London: Routledge, 2004), p.4.

disinterested in ‘naval and colonial affairs’ and having cultivated alliances with Russia and Austria-Hungary, Bismarck’s diplomacy ensured, in Morrow’s view, a state of relative peace in Europe until the 1880s when the so-called ‘new imperialism’ developed; the latter was characterised by European colonisation of Africa and Asia in particular, in which Germany participated.¹¹⁴ By 1898 German ambitions to build a naval fleet that might challenge the British in the North Sea gave clear indication of Emperor Wilhelm II’s post-Bismarckian desire to share the international stage with Britain, France and Belgium, and began to challenge existing British, French and Russian naval dominance. 1904 saw the Anglo-French *Entente Cordiale* and discussions to coordinate responses to an increasingly economically robust and politically aggressive Germany of which the Agadir Crisis of 1911, to which I return in the next section of this chapter, was one example.¹¹⁵

Germany’s gunboat diplomacy at Agadir was of keen interest to contemporary commentators. The latter included friends of Wharton, such as André Tardieu (1876-1945), who analysed its implications in *Le Mystère d’Agadir* (1912), and Fullerton, who did likewise in *Problems of Power* (1913).¹¹⁶ There can be little doubt that Wharton was familiar with the subject. Her literary contemporaries also expressed clear awareness of Prussian ambitions. E.M. Forster’s (1879-1970) *Howards End* (1910) placed ‘Germans of the dreadful sort’, the ‘aggressive German, so dear to the English journalist’ opposite Hegel and Kant’s countrymen, idealists ‘inclined to be dreamy, whose Imperialism was the Imperialism of the air’.¹¹⁷ Five years later Ford would suggest in his propagandist *Between St Dennis and St George: An Analysis of Prussian Culture* (1915) that releasing Germany from Prussian hegemony would resolve Europe’s problems.¹¹⁸ (Borkett-Jones’ work draws attention to further representations of Germany in British literature.¹¹⁹) Wharton was especially taken with *The Anglo-German Problem* (1912) by Charles Sarolea (1870-1953) whose Fascist and anti-Semitic sympathies would only be revealed during the interwar years.¹²⁰ His rhetoric emphasised both the German imperialist agenda and the inevitability of war:

The German people still live under the spell of Prussia. The Imperial Eagle, the bird of prey, still remains the dread symbol of German Imperialism. The

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p.6; also see John Lowe, *The Great Powers, Imperialism, and the German Problem, 1865-1925* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp.1, 13.

¹¹⁵ Lowe, p.14; Morrow, pp.11-3.

¹¹⁶ W.M. Morton Fullerton, *Problems of Power: A Study of International Politics from Sadowa to Kirk-Kilissé* (London: Constable & Company, 1913); André Tardieu, *Le Mystère d’Agadir* (Paris: Callman-Lévy, 1912).

¹¹⁷ E.M. Forster, *Howards End* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), p.29.

¹¹⁸ Sara Haslam, ‘Making a Text the Fordian Way: *Between St Dennis and St George*, Propaganda and the First World War’, in *Publishing in the First World War: Essays in Book History*, ed. by Mary Hammond and Shafquat Towheed (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp.202-14 (p.211).

¹¹⁹ Borkett-Jones, pp.22-5.

¹²⁰ Towheed, ‘Reading’, pp.89-90.

majority of the German people still believe in the virtues of protection, of nationalism, of militarism and despotism.¹²¹ Wharton's response was that 'Sarolea is A1', that his book 'ought to be known everywhere', and she was not alone in this opinion; reprinted in 1915, Towheed noted that it 'proved to be one of the first literary successes of the propaganda war' (*LEW*, pp.339, 341).¹²² In a letter to Anna Bahlmann dated 15 August 1914, Wharton does not hesitate to express her loathing of the 'Teuton Savages' threatening Paris. However, what she desires is the extermination (her word) of the 'German Empire', not the eradication of all German culture.¹²³ Ford's German connections would have placed him in a similar position. He wrote in 1914: 'I like the French so much; I like so much the South Germans and the Austrians, whichever side wins in the end – my own heart is certain to be mangled in either case'.¹²⁴

As argued by Towheed, Wharton distinguishes in her 1914 letter to Bahlmann between 'the Kaiser's army and Germany's cultural heritage', expressing her dismay that 'Goethe & Nietzsche belonged to this race who have put themselves outside the ban of civilization'.¹²⁵ She also remembers in *A Backward Glance* that Bahlmann introduced her to 'all the wealth of German literature, from the Minnesingers to Heine' (*ABG*, p.48). Together they read German literature and mythology and translated Goethe and others into English. It was also Bahlmann who accompanied her pupil as a young woman on an extended journey abroad, visiting a wide range of cultural destinations and going on long walks.¹²⁶ Towheed observed that Goethe, Heine and the *Minnesinger*, the 'German literature that Wharton liked best [...] predated both the rise of the nation state and its ideological concomitant, virulent militarist nationalism', but that the novelist was equally fond of other, less old-fashioned aspects of German culture, such as Nietzsche's philosophy and Wagner's music.¹²⁷ While she never visited Germany again after 1918, Wharton delighted in travelling through this country prior to the war (*NG*, p.298). For example, accompanied by Berenson, she undertook a trip by motorcar through northern Germany in August 1913, a visit during which they heard Wagner's complete *Ring Cycle* in Berlin, as well as Strauss' *Rosenkavalier* (*EW*, pp.412, 414-8; *NG*, p.285). At her request the trip opened with a few days of 'Waldeinsamkeit' or Sylvan solitude in a 'green woody walky place' – perhaps recalling long walks undertaken with Bahlmann many years before – to allow her some rest, and afterwards Wharton described those weeks in Germany as a 'golden journey to Berlin' (*LEW*, pp.303-4, 308). She was profuse in her praise for the latter, 'the model modern

¹²¹ Charles Sarolea, *The Anglo-German Problem* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1912), p.364.

¹²² Towheed, 'Reading', p.89.

¹²³ Goldman-Price, *My Dear Governess*, pp.251, 258.

¹²⁴ Haslam, 'Making a Text', pp.205-6.

¹²⁵ Towheed, 'Reading', p.87.

¹²⁶ Goldman-Price, 'Introduction', p.5.

¹²⁷ Towheed, 'Reading', pp.88-9.

Town', in its 'cleanliness, order, & general perfection' and proclaimed Dresden, despite a number of discernable shortcomings, 'a splendid river-city' (*LEW*, p.310).

Taken together, the significance of German culture in Wharton's life is unmistakable. It should not be entirely surprising that, within days following the severing of diplomatic ties between America and Germany in February 1917, Wharton let Berenson know that she was re-reading the Goethe-Schiller correspondence, a copy of which was given to her by Bahlmann in 1879, and shortly thereafter that she was rediscovering German literature last 'roamed in in my tender youth (at 14!)' (*LEW*, pp.391-2).¹²⁸ She did so under extreme circumstances. Fuel tankers were obstructed by blocks of ice on the Seine in the early weeks of 1917, and coal rationing and electricity cuts forced Wharton to hunker down in the dining room of her apartment and to spend her nights reading in bed for warmth (*NG*, p.332). Books provide care by, among other things, 'activating the memory of familial affection and familiar routine, [and by] distracting and entertaining'.¹²⁹ Not unlike the comfort provided to those in or recovering from the trenches, reading became to Wharton – as to other civilians – a refuge from the conflict and its concomitant deprivations and a reminder of life beyond war.¹³⁰ American entry into the war heralded the end of its neutral, isolationist stance that Wharton had contested, and represented a turning point that allowed her to revisit the German culture and literature that she had loved for a lifetime. In 1914, however, her political and diplomatic priority was to draw attention to the Allied cause; in order to do so, she silenced her Germanophilia to speak out against the dangers posed by, as she and many others understood it, Prussian imperialism and militarism.

2.5. *Wharton's war in print*

In a review of the publishing business of Charles Scribner's Sons during the war years, James Sait tracked the firm's changing attitude towards the effects of the conflict on its activities. He saw early indifference turn to pessimism and then 'a growing realization that the Great War was a marketable commodity'.¹³¹ Comparable realisations were reached in Britain.¹³² Charles Scribner's correspondence with Wharton demonstrates an immediate interest in commentary on and impressions of the war in Europe, but it took the firm's "'house" writers' time to process events, to re-orientate themselves in response to changing

¹²⁸ Ibid.; Goldman-Price, 'Introduction', p.7.

¹²⁹ Sara Haslam, 'Reading, Trauma and Literary Caregiving 1914-1918: Helen Mary Gaskell and the War Library', *Journal of Medical Humanities*, 41 (2020), 305-21 (p.314).

¹³⁰ Jane Potter, *Boys in Khaki, Girls in Print: Women's Literary Responses to the Great War 1914-1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), p.54; Shafquat Towheed and Edmund G.C. King, eds, *Reading and the First World War: Readers, Texts, Archives* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015).

¹³¹ James E. Sait, 'Charles Scribner's Sons and the Great War', *Princeton University Library Chronicle*, 84 (1987), 152-80 (p.160).

¹³² For example, Hynes, p.104; Potter, pp.52-4.

circumstances, and to regain their equilibrium as writers. Although she was only able to complete 'The Look of Paris' (later *Fighting France*'s opening chapter) for the May 1915 edition of *Scribner's Magazine*, Wharton had offered the article describing her impressions of Paris during wartime directly following Germany's invasion of Belgium, on 5 August 1914.¹³³ A reply from the publisher dated 14 August refers to an earlier cable, stating 'Delighted have article. Will use up to eight thousand words October Number if sent soon', that failed to reach Wharton; it offers itself as 'hearty assurance' of the magazine welcoming this article. He adds that the October number is ready for press, but that they are 'putting in an extra form for one or two war articles', emphasising interest in 'informed commentary' on the war.¹³⁴ Wharton replies, however, on 20 September: 'I have been unable to reconstitute my impressions of Paris at the outbreak of the war'; 'the overwhelming horrors of the last weeks have so blotted out my impressions of those first quiet days, that all my attempts to recover them have been unsuccessful'.¹³⁵ Henry van Dyke (1852-1933), writer as well as American ambassador to the Netherlands and Luxembourg, was similarly unable to provide his own commentary upon request:

The whole sky of Europe is black with the storm clouds of war. The Hague is full of agitated and distressed Americans who are for the most part destitute of money and desperately anxious to go home. I am working night and day to attend their necessities [...]. You can understand that I have not much time to write.¹³⁶

Wharton eventually overcame her literary silence to produce a sizeable body of writing during the war, as summarised by Kelly, including the articles that constituted *Fighting France*.¹³⁷ She noted in her autobiography that her visits to the front created in her 'an intense longing to write', but that her 'mind was burdened with practical responsibilities', her 'soul wrung with the anguish of the war'; it would be two years after the beginning of the war before she achieved the necessary 'intellectual detachment' to write *Summer* although I return to the matter of her detachment later (*ABG*, p.355). It is abundantly clear that the continued success of their business, by capturing as much of the market as possible, was a priority for Scribner's. Sait highlighted their publication of articles that admire Germany's war effort, such as James F.J. Archibald's (1871-1934) 'The New Conditions of War – As Seen from the German Side' (1915); editorial changes to contributions that were overly jingoistic, as explained in a letter to Stanley Briton who had 'statements which seem to us to be a little unsympathetic with a people in great straits [the Serbians]' toned down; and the aim to cater for a diverse audience that included 'readers [who] viewed the war from

¹³³ Sait, pp.161-3.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.161.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.162.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.163.

¹³⁷ Kelly, 'Introduction', p.1.

the perspective of a boy's juvenile fiction', as well as women.¹³⁸ To attract the latter, Scribner's asked women such as Mary King Waddington (1833-1923) to write accounts of the war at the front. Her contributions describe her flight from Paris with her invalid sister and their subsequent stay in a French village, and then a return visit to her former home, raided and vandalised by Germans after her escape.¹³⁹ She 'in her articles stresses the personal, private nature of war, far from the military hoopla, juvenile masculine enthusiasms, or serious political analysis'.¹⁴⁰ In order to retain subscribers of German heritage, and in keeping with the United States' official position, Scribner's were also careful to maintain the appearance of neutrality prior to America's declaration of war.¹⁴¹ This studied neutrality was very much diplomacy in action – both on the company's own account, but also on that of the nation. Indeed, Sait found that

articles and stories published in *Scribner's Magazine* [...] were neither radical in their political analysis nor sensational in their fictional representations. Male war-correspondents, and male and female writers in Europe and America, kept within decorous bounds in the response to editorial policy and also in response to American readers' inability to grasp the horrors of a war that, until 1917, did not touch them personally.¹⁴²

Wharton appears to have been an exception to this rule, provoking vehement reaction among readers, for example through her short story, 'Coming Home' (1915), that led to at least one cancellation of a long-term subscription based on its anti-German tone, yet proving influential in the magazine's sympathetic portrayal of the Allies.¹⁴³ By occasionally pushing back against editorial policy the novelist remained loyal to her adopted country, but her insistence on telling 'the truth' and making an 'authoritative statement' to achieve the kind of balanced understanding of the war that Rinehart advocated, also could be interpreted as a service to her birth-country.

2.6. *Realities of war*

An accusation often leveled at Wharton concerns her silence regarding wounded soldiers and injured human bodies in her accounts of the war.¹⁴⁴ Even in 1915 a review of *Fighting France* published in *Bookman* drew attention to her emphasis, not on 'the horrors of conflict' or 'the gun's achievement', but on the 'man behind the gun and the spirit that moves him'.¹⁴⁵ The *New York Times* reviewer noted in the same vein her 'calm intelligence and habitual facility of expression which have made her a peculiarly apt interpreter of the

¹³⁸ Sait, pp.168-9.

¹³⁹ Ibid., pp.169-70.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p.171.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p.176.

¹⁴² Ibid., p.178.

¹⁴³ Ibid., pp.176-8, 180.

¹⁴⁴ Kelly, 'Introduction', p.22; Matthews, pp.226-7

¹⁴⁵ Tuttleton, Lauer and Murray, pp.222-3.

French temperament'.¹⁴⁶ This description again calls to mind Kapuściński's comments on the effect of reportage to increase intercultural understanding. The same review also foregrounds the novelistic quality of *Fighting France*: 'Mrs. Wharton's war book, like her novels, is written in a style that makes one think of carved ivory'.¹⁴⁷ It has been sculpted out of actual events, stories and accidents, drawing on the techniques of fiction. However, for John Matthews the lack of connection between the casualties of war and human bodies in Wharton's accounts was the more remarkable when compared to John Dos Passos' (1896-1970) *One Man's Initiation* (1917). There 'battle is all a matter of bodies – controlling the fear and seeking the safety of your own; feeding it, marching it, cleaning it, keeping it awake; making it kill someone else's'.¹⁴⁸ Vernon Lee's pacifist allegory, *The Ballet of the Nations* (1915) also considers the human body in war by placing a dreadful emphasis on the abuses that it suffers:

[...] Death kept up the dance regardless of the state of the Dancers, and of the state of the Stage, which was such that, what between blood and entrails and heaps of devastated properties, it was barely possible to move even a few yards. Yet dance they did, lobbing each others' limbs and blinding one another with spirts of blood and pellets of human flesh. And as they appeared and disappeared in the moving wreaths of fiery smoke, they lost more and more of their original shape, becoming, in that fitful light, terrible uncertain forms, armless, legless, recognisable for human only by their irreproachable-looking heads [...]; until they became, with those decorous well-groomed faces, mere unspeakable hybrids between man and beast, they who had come on to the stage so erect and beautiful.¹⁴⁹

Perhaps it is this unspeakable effect of war that makes La Motte criticise the insistence on healing bodies when death is preferable. In 'A Surgical Triumph' Antoine's eighteen-year-old son is reduced to 'a wreck' who 'kept sobbing, kept weeping out of his sightless eyes, kept jerking his four stumps in supplication, kept begging in agony: "Kill me, Papa!"'.¹⁵⁰ Even the smell of war injuries feature in her sketches. In 'La Patrie Reconnaissante' Marius suffers from gas gangrene, 'the smell of death that others complained of', as does Rochard, who has 'nobody to love him, to forget about that smell' in 'Alone'.¹⁵¹ Such literary foregrounding of the centrality of the human body during the Great War finds stark corroboration in a singular piece of footage filmed by a French infantryman, Sergeant Albert Gal-Ladevèze, between 1915 and 1916. The film sequence captures the removal of French corpses from the front. Jay Winter commented that the 'stacking of corpses like firewood in

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p.221.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Matthews, p.230.

¹⁴⁹ Vernon Lee, *The Ballet of the Nations: A Present-Day Morality* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1915), pp.27-8.

¹⁵⁰ Ellen N. La Motte, 'A Surgical Triumph', in *The Backwash of War: The Human Wreckage of the Battlefield as Witnessed by an American Hospital Nurse* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1916), pp.143-55 (p.155).

¹⁵¹ La Motte, 'La Patrie Reconnaissante', p.23; Ellen N. La Motte, 'Alone', in *The Backwash of War: The Human Wreckage of the Battlefield as Witnessed by an American Hospital Nurse* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1916), pp.49-59 (p.51).

the aftermath of battle' in order to remove and bury them in provisional graves, occurred to prevent the sanitary dangers posed by decomposing corpses.¹⁵² Yet,

Gal-Ladevèze's filmic and accompanying still visual imagery of industrial warfare and of industrialized armies dealing with the "waste" products of industrial warfare is shocking. Armies frequently used the term "wastage" to refer to casualties, but that euphemism turns into something entirely different when we see that the term refers to dead men, who were evidently alive not long before.¹⁵³

For Winter 'it is not the logistics of removing the dead [often bound in tents and loaded onto wagons] from the field of battle that is striking', but the 'treatment of dead soldiers like the effluent from a vast factory of death'.¹⁵⁴

Buitenhuis argued that *Fighting France* gives little account of 'the horror and the fear and the filth' of the war and indeed, the kind of industrialised horror that Winter analysed is absent from Wharton's account.¹⁵⁵ The latter seems comparatively sanguine about a conflict compared to 'hell with the lid off', one that cost some ten million human lives.¹⁵⁶ The potential complicity of writers like Wharton in the construction of silence concerning the realities of the war is rightfully scrutinised, for instance regarding its death toll or the severity of injuries, but it is also worth asking what exactly Wharton saw at the front and to what extent she was able to reveal war in all its hellish detail. Blazek argued that while Wharton entered 'the otherwise exclusive ground of male experience' consisting of trenches, soldiers, artillery fire and attack, hers remained a 'privileged experience'; 'she was in little danger along relatively quiet sectors of the Western Front in 1915; and in the remaining three years of fighting [during which time it 'would be horribly transformed'], she became but another spectator behind the lines'.¹⁵⁷ In addition, the silences constructed around the war responded, to an extent, to the requirements of editors and audiences, as Sait's observation regarding the American reading public demonstrates, and to those of bureaucratic powers. Certainly civilian intolerance for the realities of the war influenced the body of writing on it, but such intolerance was sustained by authorised, and highly selective, discourses surrounding the conflict. For example, writers in Britain, especially journalists, either produced governmentally directed 'morale-boosting propaganda', or risked censorship; candid letters from soldiers at the front were censored before they reached their intended recipients; sometimes soldiers self-censored to spare their loved-ones.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵² Jay Winter, *War Beyond Words: Languages of Remembrance from the Great War to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p.44.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p.45.

¹⁵⁵ Buitenhuis, p.62.

¹⁵⁶ Nicolson, pp.21, 25.

¹⁵⁷ Blazek, 'French Lessons', pp.18-9.

¹⁵⁸ For example, Fussell, p.95; Robert L. Nelson, 'German Soldier Newspapers and Their Allied Counterparts', in *Reading and the First World War: Readers, Texts, Archives*, ed. by Shafquat Towheed and Edmund G.C. King (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp.209-26 (p.212); Nicolson, p.19.

Hutchison's description of the Great War as supposedly having been about freedom, but 'sustained by mass conscription and the suppression of free speech' seems especially apt in this context.¹⁵⁹

On the home front it took time for official war rhetoric to be replaced with, in Samuel Hynes' words, one created by 'articulate men [who had] experienced the trench world, and tried to record what they had seen there'.¹⁶⁰ Andrew Frayn noted that while explicit portrayals of war injuries would become commonplace by the end of the 1920s, writing about a widespread medical intervention like amputation at the start of that decade was still unusual; censorship and 'tacit social controls' would suppress or delay publication of works about the war that seemed overtly critical or overly graphic in content.¹⁶¹ Barbusse's *Le Feu* was translated and published in England in July 1917 and read by Siegfried Sassoon (1886-1967) and Wilfred Owen (1893-1918) (who commended it to Ezra Pound [1885-1972]) and Percy Wyndham Lewis (1882-1957). It was also read by former combatant and Military Intelligence press censor and propagandist, Charles E. Montague, who described it as 'a book in which war is all mud and blood and an agony of fatigue, as it is to some men'.¹⁶² Hynes explained that while personal memoirs and Sassoon's and Robert Graves' (1895-1985) war poetry had begun to appear by 1917, at the time there had not been a 'truth-telling' example of prose fiction comparable to *Le Feu* in English.¹⁶³ Instead, war novels, published with increasing frequency from early 1915, often resembled boys' adventure stories aimed at adults; instant history books that explored the causes behind and issues connected to England's involvement in the war, aimed at adults and sometimes also at children; or recruiting tracts. There was also the cheerfully realistic style of 'Junior Sub' or Ian Hay's (1876-1952) *The First Hundred Thousand*, which was on shelves in time for Christmas 1915, and other service authors, such as Herman Cyril McNeile (1888-1937) who published under the name of 'Sapper'.¹⁶⁴

During and after the war, the literary market found itself subject to rapid change. Initial interest in uncritical books faded quickly and then, with the exception of poetry, the end of the war also heralded a break in the publication of English war literature of a 'realistic, anti-monumental kind'; publishers convinced that public interest had waned, rejected writing with an anti-war tone.¹⁶⁵ Ford's semi-autobiographical *No Enemy* was written in 1919, but

¹⁵⁹ Hutchison, p.2.

¹⁶⁰ Hynes, p.114.

¹⁶¹ Andrew Frayn, *Writing Disenchantment: British First World War Prose, 1914-30* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), pp.102, 225-6.

¹⁶² Hynes, p.205.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., pp.43-9.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., pp.298-9.

only appeared in print a decade on, while Wharton's publishers and readers proved less than receptive to *A Son at the Front*'s (1923) portrayal of the effect of war on those at home (*EW*, pp.591, 595).¹⁶⁶ Still, the renewed proliferation of critical war books during the late 1920s did not come out of nowhere. Haslam regarded 1929 as the 'mid-point climax' of a new tradition that had been growing since 1924, with the publication of Ford's *Some Do Not...*¹⁶⁷ The slow process towards readiness to speak out is demonstrated by Richard Aldington's (1892-1962) struggle to write what eventually became *Death of a Hero* (1929), drafted and aborted in 1919, 1925 and again in 1927.¹⁶⁸

In his analysis of the 'war books boom' seen in Britain, America and Germany around the late 1920s, Vincent Trott commented on the loose connection between genre and 'a book's fidelity to fact'; Graves' *Goodbye to All That* (1929) is a memoir that includes fictional elements, or 'inaccuracies and exaggeration for deliberate dramatic effect'.¹⁶⁹ Sassoon's *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (1930) is a semi-biographical novel that draws on the first-hand experiences of its author. Also included in the boom were female perspectives, as portrayed in Borden's *The Forbidden Zone* (1929) and Vera Brittain's (1893-1970) *Testament of Youth* (1933). These works reflected modernist values of the early twentieth century, 'shaped by an antagonism towards certain all-too positive elements' that included 'uncritical endorsement of traditional forms, uplifting sentiments and happy endings, complacency about the course of world events, [and] approbation of the social order', to draw on Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz's characterisation of 'the history of the modernist affront'.¹⁷⁰ They were 'anti-idealistic' and 'minimalist', rejecting the 'sentimentality and lies of wartime propaganda' built on patriotic certainty and war-related euphemisms involving glorious battles fought by the glorious dead.¹⁷¹ In the meantime, and certainly until 'women [and parents, and children] saw the damaged men returning from that world, and experienced loss and grief', the obliviousness and even disbelief back home increased the sense of isolation and distress among husbands, sons and fathers caught up in the trauma of warfare.¹⁷²

In addition to the expectations of the authorities, publishers and readers, and Wharton's restricted experience of the front, the thematic silence over the realities of the war in her

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p.299; Blazek, 'Wharton and France', p.16.

¹⁶⁷ Haslam, "'The moaning'", p.47.

¹⁶⁸ Frayn, p.212.

¹⁶⁹ Vincent Trott, *Publishers, Readers and the Great War: Literature and Memory Since 1918* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), pp.71-2.

¹⁷⁰ Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, 'Introduction: Modernisms Bad and New', in *Bad Modernisms*, ed. by Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz (Durham: Duke University, 2006), pp.1-18 (p.3).

¹⁷¹ Olin-Ammentorp, 'Wharton and World War I', p.299; Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.2.

¹⁷² Hynes, p.114; Nicolson, pp.18-21.

early war writing was motivated by her support of the war effort and desire to encourage American financial and military involvement. If she was to impress on her readers the value of cultural and moral victory, its virtue rather than its cost had to be emphasised. As Matthews summarised this attitude, '[o]nly the willingness to die for a civilization can prove its spiritual value'.¹⁷³ Newbold 'Bo' Rhinelander's decision to join the American Ambulance Corps in 1916, and eventually the US Army Corps, for example, met with Wharton's heartfelt approval. She expressed her deep pleasure to her cousin, his father Thomas N. Rhinelander, that Bo had been given, and had grasped, the opportunity to see 'this great moment of history, & lending a hand in the cause', adding that 'such an experience ought to last throughout life' (*EW*, p.451).¹⁷⁴ The heavy toll of the fight – 'the unnamed wounding and destruction of bodies' – had to be passed over in large part if *Fighting France* was to succeed in what Jean Gallagher termed its 'propagandistic work'; Wharton is tasked with evoking for American readers 'the narratives of wounding that are not directly represented but that the readers must imagine in order to support the Allies in Europe'.¹⁷⁵ Bo Rhinelander's plane was shot down during a raid inside German territory in late September 1918 (*LEW*, p.413). When he was reported missing, Wharton was unstinting in her efforts to help locate him. Towards the end of October 1918, she had 'appealed to the Ambassador, to Mr Drexel, to the Red Cross, to the authorities at Newbold's camp, &c' (*LEW*, p.412). In 1919 she would dedicate the poem 'You and You' to '*The American private in the great war*' and distinguish between those with '[r]uddy faces' (line 38) who, '[a]fter the turmoil and blood and pain' (line 39), would return home, and those, reduced to 'bleaching bones' (line 38), now 'sleeping alone in the fine French rain' (line 41).¹⁷⁶ By then she had arranged and attended Bo's funeral on behalf of his parents in the village where his plane had crashed (*LEW*, p.413).¹⁷⁷ By then too Roosevelt had described his own son's death in 1918 as 'heart-breaking', but preferable to life 'at the cost of the slightest failure to perform his duty' (*EW*, p.155). Wharton did have intimate knowledge of the danger, uncertainty and anguish of war – knowledge that she would fictionalise in *A Son at the Front* – and her familiarity with these features was not restricted entirely to the end of the conflict either.¹⁷⁸

Her support of fighting on behalf of France, and of France itself being mobilised for war, along with her exhilaration over her own contributions to the war effort, is evident. Her

¹⁷³ Matthews, p.226.

¹⁷⁴ Price, p.133.

¹⁷⁵ Jean Gallagher, *World Wars Through the Female Gaze* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998), pp.19, 21.

¹⁷⁶ Edith Wharton, 'You and You', in *Edith Wharton: Selected Poems*, ed. by Louis Auchincloss (New York: Library of America, 2005), pp.139-42.

¹⁷⁷ Kelly, 'Introduction', p.36.

¹⁷⁸ Julie Olin-Ammentorp, 'Willa Cather's *One of Ours*, Edith Wharton's *A Son at the Front*, and the Literature of the Great War', *Cather Studies*, 8 (2010), 125-47 (p.129).

letters to James, recounting her impressions of the frontlines, speak of her satisfaction in being able to arrange her visits:

It took a great deal of démarching & counter marching to get a laissez-passer [...] [but] I did, a day or two ago, get a splendid permesso, & immediately loaded up the motor with clothes & medicaments & dashed off from Paris with Walter yesterday morning (*LEW*, p.348).

Sara Prieto pointed out that Wharton travelled along the western front in her own motorcar – and at great expense.¹⁷⁹ This is important because it relates her war experience to that of other women who found themselves able to participate in a traditionally male sphere, as well as to her class and privileged level of access. She finds her second visit ‘less high in colour than the first adventure, & result[ing] in several disappointments’, but it too produces ‘some interesting moments – indeed, once within the military zone *every* moment is interesting’ (*LEW*, p.351). Wharton often characterises her frontline trips as ‘adventures’ and, referring to ‘scaling heights or exploring trenches’, cannon fire in the background, portrays herself as an intrepid revealer of fact (*LEW*, pp.353-4, 356). Her diction echoes the tone of early Great War literature, but also positions her within a broader narrative of women who are empowered, and excited because they are empowered, by the war. Yet her advocacy – and Wharton’s correspondence to friends was doubtlessly written to persuade as well as to inform – is certainly not all buoyant and bright, as her comments to Sara Norton bear out. Is this what Sait means when he states that Wharton’s work published in *Scribner’s Magazine* ‘shows signs of being radically altered because of her first-hand experience of the War’?¹⁸⁰ ‘The Look of Paris’ describes, in addition to the quiet nobility of the inhabitants of that city, the refugees mingling among them.¹⁸¹ While Wharton could not help but ennoble the wounded soldiers who have returned to Paris, ‘calm, meditative, strangely purified and matured’ by their ‘great experience’ (p.20), the merciless plight of refugees, with which she was intimately familiar through her work with the Children of Flanders war charity, resisted being put in a positive light. The best she could do, apart from working tirelessly to help refugees, was to reinforce the cruelty of the war and German culpability in her writing and as she did so, she inevitably also backed the war effort.

The ‘great army of refugees’ is made up of ‘men and women with sordid bundles on their backs, shuffling along hesitatingly in their tattered shoes, children dragging at their hands and tired-out babies pressed against their shoulders’ (p.17), emphasising that war spares nobody. They have ‘that stare of dumb bewilderment – or that look of concentrated horror, full of the reflection of flames and ruins’. This ‘look in their eyes [...] is the dark shadow on

¹⁷⁹ Prieto, “Without methods”, p.173.

¹⁸⁰ Sait, p.178.

¹⁸¹ Kelly, ‘Introduction’, p.11.

the brightness of the face she [Paris] turns to the enemy' (p.17). Here in *Fighting France*, as early as 1915, Wharton portrays the horrors of war that even bright, determined Paris cannot escape entirely. Her language is unusually explicit: 'a great darkness full of fire and blood' that has left the 'memory of burning homes and massacred children and young men dragged to slavery, of infants torn from their mothers, old men trampled by drunken heels and priests slain while they prayed beside the dying' (p.17). An earlier poem, entitled 'The Tryst' (1914), is even more candid.¹⁸² The speaker asks a woman fleeing from the north, where the 'streets are foul with the slime of the dead, / [a]nd all the rivers run poison-red / [w]ith the bodies drifting by' (lines 16-8), '[i]s there none to come at your call / [i]n all this throng astray?' (lines 19-20), and the woman answers:

They shot my husband against a wall,
And my child (she said), too little to crawl,
Held up its hands to catch the ball
When the gun-muzzle turned its way (lines 21-4).

It is difficult to judge to what extent these representations of violence in Wharton's reportage and poetry were based on direct accounts told to her, on press coverage, or on hearsay. Price suggested that Wharton's relative isolation at Stocks during the late summer of 1914 caused her to dwell on reports of German atrocities, and this preoccupation is also evident in her correspondence dating to the period.¹⁸³ Some of these reports she had from acquaintances, but some must have come from newspapers that typically recounted tales of violence against Belgian women and children and emphasised the vulnerability of families. In Britain especially this war publicity was meant to soothe opposition to the country's participation in the war.¹⁸⁴ Perhaps the most important consideration is that what she heard appeared to satisfy Wharton sufficiently to sketch them to her readers, to make them 'feel the fact'.

There are other instances where *Fighting France* draws attention to the human body and its vulnerability, of which two are especially significant. In the village of Clermont, Wharton witnessed the extraordinary efforts put toward sometimes healing, but mostly easing, broken bodies along the frontline in the Argonne region. Patients were 'crowded' into a 'few hovels' in a village 'meant to house four or five hundred', but 'where [now] troops and wounded are packed in thousands' (p.31). Wharton followed the doctor from cottage to cottage to observe the situation for herself, before being led to the church. Four rows of wooden cots had been placed in the nave, occupied by 'the doctor's "worst cases"'. These

¹⁸² Edith Wharton, 'The Tryst', in *Edith Wharton: Selected Poems*, ed. by Louis Auchincloss (New York: Library of America, 2005), pp.192-4.

¹⁸³ Price, p.21.

¹⁸⁴ Leanne Green, 'Advertising War: Picturing Belgium in First World War Publicity', *Media, War & Conflict*, 7 (2014), 309-25 (p.316).

men, ‘few of them wounded’, are ‘stricken with fever, bronchitis, pleurisy, or some other form of trench sickness too severe to permit of their being carried farther from the front’ (p.31). Here Wharton recognises and catalogues a variety of illnesses connected to trench warfare, although interestingly in a letter to James she uses only the phrase, ‘the sick & the nervously shattered’, to describe these cases, possibly to spare her friend (*LEW*, p.349). While she underlines their severity in her published account, one might be tempted to criticise Wharton’s overly literal interpretation of ‘wounding’. In this context she appears to view it as encompassing injuries resulting from direct conflict only, but the horror of the Great War lay also in the debilitating periods of waiting that interspersed live battles. Such periods of ‘inactivity’, when rats and lice and bluebottles and cockroaches continued to roam freely through the muddy trenches, when various respiratory diseases took hold and trench foot developed, did not pause suffering.¹⁸⁵ There is little reason not to classify such conditions as *bona fide* war wounds, but Wharton’s reluctance to do so becomes less surprising if one considers that while studied and treated during the Great War, shell shock, or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was only defined formally following the Vietnam War in 1980, when it was recognised as a ‘legitimate medical syndrome with causes, characteristics, and regimes of care’.¹⁸⁶ The legitimisation of battle trauma followed decades of silence, surrounding and ironically also itself symptomatic of what used to be called shell shock, leading to its woeful underrepresentation in official records, despite the ‘serious and substantial’ effect of this condition on soldiers who returned from the Great War.¹⁸⁷ In this regard it is worth thinking briefly about the rewards of forgetting. I do not suggest that official silence surrounding PTSD is desirable, especially considering the debilitating long-term effects of its symptoms, but in *The Art of Forgetting* (1999) Adrian Forty reminded us that the act of forgetting, which is a form of silence, often allows us to move forward. As David Rieff argued in his *In Praise of Forgetting* (2016), the opposite of forgetting or of staying silent, namely remembering, serves little purpose if our aim is to avoid past mistakes in the present or future. The historical record attests to this fact. Rieff even demonstrated how traumatic history itself is harnessed to justify conflict and the inevitable creation of further trauma.¹⁸⁸ Not all silences related to trauma are categorically negative.

To return to the war-injured lying in the church nave in Clermont, Wharton stipulates that their illnesses prevent them from being moved from the front, while her use of imagery in

¹⁸⁵ Nicolson, p.21.

¹⁸⁶ Hynes, pp.176-7; Winter, *War*, p.198.

¹⁸⁷ MaryCatherine McDonald, Marisa Brandt and Robyn Bluhm, ‘From Shell-Shock to PTSD, a Century of Invisible War Trauma’, *The Conversation*, 4 April 2017 <<https://theconversation.com/from-shell-shock-to-ptsd-a-century-of-invisible-war-trauma-74911>> [accessed 18 June 2021]; Winter, *War*, p.184.

¹⁸⁸ Adrian Forty, ‘Introduction’, in *The Art of Forgetting*, ed. by Adrian Forty and Susanne Küchler (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1999), pp.1-18 (p.7); David Rieff, *In Praise of Forgetting: Historical Memory and its Ironies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), pp.39, 56-7.

the account implies unmistakably that they are fatal. Her company reaches the church as the bell tolls for vespers. The afternoon is 'sunless', and the scene 'all in monastic shades of black and white and ashen grey' (p.31). The few civilian women attending the service are wearing black, and Wharton puts in parentheses that they 'seemed all to be in mourning' (p.31). The light cast by the candles on the altar is that of a 'sunset on the winter dusk' (p.32). The crepuscular elements in her description, vespers, dark hues, faint light, sunset and winter, all speak of endings. So does the stillness of the injured: 'One or two heads turned on the pillows as we entered, but for the most part the men did not move' (p.31); 'the bodies in the cots never stirred' (p.32). The silent bodies, the heads, the 'livid faces' (p.31) no longer belong to the living; they are liminal, covered by 'earth-coloured blankets' (p.3) that prefigure interment.¹⁸⁹ Indeed, to Wharton 'the church looked like a quiet graveyard in a battlefield' (p.32). Her wider interest in silent contemplation and religious architecture creates an aching irony in the text, when she breaks her thematic silence regarding the human body in war, over a collection of broken bodies laid out inside a space that is devoted to quiet reflection.

Wharton also pauses over this topic in a very different kind of silence. During May 1915 she was taken to see a first-line trench in the Lorraine-Vosges region. There, a 'watcher at his peephole' asks her if she wants to look down from the lookout where 'with one's eye to the leaf-lashed hole, one saw at last... saw, at the bottom of the harmless glen, half way between cliff and cliff, a grey uniform huddled in a dead heap' (p.62). The eyewitness quality of this passage is as noticeable as Wharton's shift from first- to third-person, an involuntary distancing from the shock of what is clearly not only a huddled uniform, but a German soldier's body huddled in a heap. Kelly noted the importance of the corpse being that of a German soldier, 'because the matter-of-fact description and the treatment of his body would most likely have been too distressing for an American readership, had he been an ally'.¹⁹⁰ She referred also to the remark made by the lookout about the body: "'He's been there for days: they can't fetch him away'" (p.62). This remark is indeed matter of fact, and surely would have discomfited Wharton's contemporary audience, as it moves twenty-first-century readers. It does so, not because the tone suggests a lack of emotion, as Kelly implied, but because its brusque delivery is a thin disguise for the understanding among those who shared the traumatic experiences of the war, whether they were allies or adversaries. The lookout has been watching his foe, watching him. He knows that even 'barbarians' wish to take care of their dead, wish to remove their bodies, wish not to let them lie huddled in a no-man's-land where their decay is on display to enemy watchers, and Wharton knows that he knows.

¹⁸⁹ Also see Kelly, 'Introduction', pp.31-2.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., p.33.

She may be advocating again, drawing attention to the empathy of a French soldier, but by reporting his words she also acknowledges that losses are suffered on both sides.¹⁹¹ In breaking her thematic silence regarding the true cost of war, Wharton comments indirectly on a different kind of silence too, namely the silent, negative spaces that break the overwhelming noise of physical combat and that, strangely like silences in religious contexts, allow for reflection and insight – strangely too, because silence, muting noise, and listening were critical survival strategies during the war.

Haslam and Vandeveld both argued that hearing was an essential skill in a conflict where vision was so often compromised, and where ‘[o]ne way to try and stay alive was to determine the exact nature of each artillery threat – by listening to it’.¹⁹² As part of his analysis of the soundscape of Ford’s *Parade’s End*, Vandeveld discussed a ‘sound-death/silence-life dichotomy’ characterising the war years.¹⁹³ This same dichotomy occurs in Wharton’s description of her visit to the Lorraine-Vosges first-line trenches in *Fighting France*. As the party moves through the trenches, a ‘hush and secrecy [...] seemed to fill the silence with mysterious pulsations’ (p.61). This pulsating silence is broken by the ‘rap of a rifle shot against a tree-trunk’ (p.61). Immediately the visitors are told “[n]o more talking”, that whenever the invisible sharp-shooter, their ‘arboreal listener’, “hears voices he fires” (p.61). There is no mistaking the importance of silence to anyone wishing to avoid being shot. Equally, the sharp-shooter’s success depends on his ability to listen and discern sound within the silence; in addition to helping soldiers stay alive, hearing helps them to kill. The loaded absence of sound in this scene is most noticeable when the quiet is broken, first by the onomatopoeic ‘rap’ of the rifle shot, and later by the ‘intermittent drip of rain’ (p.62). Thinking about categorisation, this would be an example of environmental silence.

Wharton’s account of the German soldier’s body acts as a counterpoint to those that stress the overwhelming noise of trench warfare. In a 1971 interview for *Listener*, Graves commented on the difficulty of going home: ‘the idea of being and staying at home was awful because you were with people who didn’t understand what this was all about’. When asked whether he did not wish to tell them about it, he replied simply that ‘[y]ou couldn’t: you can’t communicate noise. Noise never stopped for one moment – ever’.¹⁹⁴ In the same interview, Henry Williamson (1895-1977), another of Hynes’ ‘articulate men’ who had experienced the trenches, recalled the noise upon arriving for the Battle of Ypres. His first

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Haslam, ““The moaning””, p.49; Vandeveld, p.58.

¹⁹³ Vandeveld, p.60.

¹⁹⁴ Radio 4, ‘The Great Years of Their Lives – Robert Graves, Brigadier C. E. Lucas Phillips, Henry Williamson and Lord Chandos talk to Leslie Smith about the First World War’, *Listener*, 86 (1971), 73-5 (p.74).

impressions, influenced heavily by the sounds of war, are reminiscent of the Romantic sensitivity to the sublime:

When we went up the line and saw right in the distance the gun flashes and heard the low booming like a summer storm, we just stood there, in the grounds of the Convent of St Omar, and listened and listened and I felt it was romantic and strange and terrible.¹⁹⁵

This awe-inspiring summer storm is an artificial construct of dread instead of a natural phenomenon. Williamson's disillusionment is laid bare in a 1928 *Daily Express* article, entitled 'I Believe in the Men Who Died'. He describes how the ringing of commemorative bells, whose 'immense torrent of sound' metamorphoses into the 'clangour of massed guns', would spark his wartime memories:

[...] I go with them [the ringers], climbing on up the worn stone steps of the dim spiral stairway, to the bells. The ropes and wheels begin to creak; the bells begin to swing, and the tower trembles. Then with a dinning crash the metal tongues smite the deep bronze mouths, and an immense torrent of sound pours out of the narrow doorway.

The great sound sweeps other thought away into the air, and the earth fades; the powerful wraith of those four years of the war enters into me, and the torrent becomes the light and clangour of massed guns that thrall the senses.¹⁹⁶

There are echoes with Graves' reservations about going home when he writes that '[t]hose at home, sitting in armchairs and talking proudly of patriotism and heroism, will never realise the bitter contempt and scorn the soldiers have for these and other abstractions'.¹⁹⁷ The reason for their contempt and scorn is particularly striking; 'the soldiers feel they have been betrayed by the high-sounding phrases that heralded the war, for they know that the enemy soldiers are the same men as themselves, suffering and disillusioned in exactly the same way...'.¹⁹⁸ Williamson knows firsthand what Wharton has grasped and reported, even if indirectly, and that is that the shared humanity between those who fight a war often outweighs their differences; the 'summer is beautiful to men of all nations, and every man was once a little boy with an imagination'.¹⁹⁹

It is the soundscape of the war, consisting of deafening noise and deafening silence, that facilitates both writers' insights. Yet as trench soldiers Williamson and Graves and others were exposed to extremities of sound that Wharton would have been spared, even though she was on occasion right on the margins of live battle, such as the one near Clermont-en-Argonne where 'cannons were booming without pause' and guns went '[r]ap, rap rap' (p.29). During the same visit she saw at Châlons a long line of walking wounded, 'éclopés',

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p.73.

¹⁹⁶ Henry Williamson, 'I Believe in the Men Who Died', The Henry Williamson Society, 2017 <<https://www.henrywilliamson.co.uk/57-uncategorised/180-i-believe-in-the-men-who-died>> [accessed 29 September 2017].

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

who include the '[...] deafened [...] wreckage of the awful struggle' (p.23). The cacophony of live battle surrounding men slaying and dying in the trenches was inseparable from the silence that would follow. Vandeveldt found that silence 'features as more than a pause during conversation, becoming almost tactile' in Ford's *No More Parades* (1925), 'which drops the reader straight into the trenches and the deafening soundscape that comes with it'.²⁰⁰ The pauses that interspersed assaults facilitated listening, as already mentioned, but also allowed brief rest and recovery. In 'Trench Duty' (1918) Sassoon's soldier has just awoken; in 'Before the Battle' (1916) another scorns '[...] the growl and rumble of the fight / That summons me from cool / Silence of marsh and pool' (lines 9-11).²⁰¹ Pauses provided spaces in which to observe the dead, as Graves' speaker does in 'A Dead Boche' (1918), Sassoon's in 'Suicide in the Trenches' (1918) and Owen's in 'Futility' (1918). Perhaps most frighteningly, pauses signaled rattling guns giving way to the gas that drives Owen's 'boys' to their 'ecstasy of fumbling, / Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time' (lines 9-10) in 'Dulce Et Decorum Est' (1920).²⁰² Chlorine gas was used at Ypres in 1915 but by 1918 had been replaced by even more lethal mustard gas.²⁰³

Returning to Wharton's perceived silence over the effect of war on the human body, she seldom lingers long over this theme and this does create a muted 'narrative of wounding', to borrow another phrase from Gallagher.²⁰⁴ I suggest that the novelist's message is modulated in order to answer the demands of her own convictions and conscience, as well as the demands of others. This may explain in part her emphasis on the destruction of the built environment, as noted by Kelly, among others.²⁰⁵ Readers outraged over reports of cultural devastation engage with the war, but do so 'safely', shielded as they are from the accompanying horrors that, as Teresa Gómez Reus and Peter Lauber pointed out, are subject to censorship when recounted. In their fine-grained reading of different spaces in *Fighting France*, Gómez Reus and Lauber also recalled that the relationship between characters and homes in Wharton's writing is always 'emphatically reciprocal', suggesting an aesthetic explanation for Wharton's attention to buildings.²⁰⁶ This is not to underestimate the harm done to communities when their cultural heritage is ruined. The Baedeker raids of World War Two occurred in retaliation against the destruction of German cities by the Royal Air Force in 1942, an approach intended specifically to undermine morale. Yet, the

²⁰⁰ Vandeveldt, p.55.

²⁰¹ Siegfried Sassoon, 'Before the Battle', in *The War Poems of Siegfried Sassoon* (London: W. Heinemann, 1919), p.27.

²⁰² Wilfred Owen, 'Dulce Et Decorum Est', in *Poetry of the First World War: An Anthology*, ed. by Tim Kendall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp.154-5 (p.155).

²⁰³ Nicolson, p.18.

²⁰⁴ Gallagher, p.19.

²⁰⁵ Kelly, 'Introduction', pp.29-30; Matthews, p.227; Tylee, 'Imagining Women', pp.327-8.

²⁰⁶ Kelly, 'Introduction', p.30; Teresa Gómez Reus and Peter Lauber, 'In a Literary No Man's Land: A Spatial Reading of Edith Wharton's *Fighting France*', in *Inside Out: Women Negotiating, Subverting, Appropriating Public and Private Space*, ed. by Teresa Gómez Reus and Aránzazu Usandizaga (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 2008), pp.205-28 (p.211).

foregrounding of damage to the built environment can never adequately substitute frank exposure of the human casualties of war. What Wharton's modulated silence in this respect did do, was allow her to write professionally about the war in a way that satisfied editors and audiences, her own desire to champion the Allied cause, and her sincere concern over the German threat to Europe's cultural heritage. That a female author achieved all this is critical.

Notably, then, Wharton was in terms of her purposeful writing on the war, comparable to Mrs Humphry Ward, leader of opposition against women's suffrage in Britain and co-founder of the *Anti-Suffrage Review*. Roosevelt recommended that the British Department of Information, possibly at the instigation of their mutual friend Edith Wharton, sponsored Mary Ward to write *England's Effort* (1916) with the American public as her main target.²⁰⁷ His words to Ward were that 'the English "side" of things had not been at all well presented in America'.²⁰⁸ *England's Effort* followed the epistolary style of Aldrich's *A Hilltop*, but shared Wharton's objective to help end American isolationism and was published, similarly to *Fighting France*, in article and book form for maximum impact.²⁰⁹ It has also been noted that both Wharton and Ward's accounts often resemble travel writing, a genre particularly accessible to women writers at the front, and which will be examined in the next section, in their foregrounding of 'panoramic landscapes, spectacular scenes, and buildings in ruins' and their emotional responses to these sights.²¹⁰

2.7. Wharton in a male sphere

Claire Tylee examined how Wharton employed war fiction 'to confront men's attempted subordination of women'.²¹¹ Aspects of her discussion of the male and female gaze are transferable to Wharton's reportage. She argues that

the male and female gaze do not have equivalent power. In a patriarchal culture, to speak or to own and activate the gaze is to be in a masculine position [...]. Thus, for a woman to narrate or to look, to spectate, may be subversive, an act of defiance that threatens to emasculate the male object of her view – as the myth of Medusa's face bears out.²¹²

I am not persuaded that Wharton's reportage knowingly or unknowingly emasculates the male object of her view, but it remains extraordinary that she speaks with authority on a socio-political event that, certainly until 1914, was dominated by men. She and others break the contemporary underlying, gendered silence surrounding the war. The power of the

²⁰⁷ Claire M. Tylee, "Munitions of the Mind": Travel Writing, Imperial Discourse and Great War Propaganda', *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, 39 (1996), 171-92 (pp.172-3).

²⁰⁸ John Sutherland, *Mrs Humphry Ward: Eminent Victorian, Pre-Eminent Edwardian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p.350.

²⁰⁹ Tylee, "Munitions of the Mind", pp.177-9.

²¹⁰ Ibid., p.178; Sutherland, pp.353-4.

²¹¹ Tylee, 'Imagining Women', p.328.

²¹² Ibid., p.330.

silence belongs to men. Jaworski put it most eloquently when he wrote that ‘the common silence of male inexpressiveness has been viewed as a peculiar sign of men’s political domination over women’.²¹³ He refers here to the ‘relaxing, private silence that men have access to at home’ and which, he argues, traditionally has been inaccessible to women, but the guarding of silences by men in a public sphere signals exactly the same domination.²¹⁴ Soldiers, or at least men, were for most of the previous century the principal wagers, observers and reporters of war. Not only did they physically make war, they also mediated civilian understanding of it, through their speech and silence. Yet here a woman enters what is, traditionally, ‘an ideologically male sphere’.²¹⁵ Rather than emasculating others, she demonstrates that it is possible to change a ‘structure that is already coded as male’, as Beard phrased it, by her entry into this sphere.²¹⁶

Wharton’s influence here surpasses her written engagement as a woman with women and women’s issues, as outlined in Chapter 2. During the war years, Wharton the writer and humanitarian employed her significant expertise and resources on behalf of men and women, and was taken seriously in the way that Beard envisaged women to be in a structure where one does not automatically think of power as male, although her ability to act still depended on public prestige.²¹⁷ This was especially so in the strongly patriarchal French social system of the early twentieth century that did not give women the vote until 1945 (*MMS*, pp.193-4). Wharton observed that ‘[French] women are not expected to talk much’, and, disconcertingly, that they are ‘generally far more intelligent listeners than talkers’.²¹⁸ Her entry into the war was facilitated by her reputation as a writer, but also by her privilege and connections. It was initially in response to a request from the French Red Cross that Wharton visited military hospitals near the front to take them supplies and to report on conditions, but she ventured further afield under her own initiative, with the particular aim to raise funds.²¹⁹ Securing the *laissez-passer* mentioned to James and allowing her to enter war zones restricted to others, required Wharton to draw in favours from a list of high-placed contacts. Walter Berry’s presence during these visits expedited the acquisition of passes, but she also benefited from her associations with ‘the diplomat Jules Cambon, the politician Paul Boncour, the writer Jean-Louis Vaudoyer, the war correspondent Raymond Recouly’ and the aid of military officials such as General Joffre’s chief-of-staff, General Pelle, who gave special permission for Wharton’s visits to the front, and General Humbert, who

²¹³ Jaworski, p.120.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.119-20.

²¹⁵ Kelly, ‘Introduction’, pp.32-3.

²¹⁶ Beard, pp.86-7.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.85-7.

²¹⁸ Edith Wharton, *French Ways and their Meaning* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1919), pp.24-5.

²¹⁹ Kelly, ‘Introduction’, p.6.

received her for lunch during her visit to the front in Lorraine and the Vosges (*LEW*, p.355).²²⁰ Both Joffre and Humbert would later contribute to Wharton's *The Book of the Homeless*.

Wharton was not the only or even the first civilian woman to visit military hospitals. Her first pass to take supplies to hospitals in the east was delayed because 'two or three titled women who had been allowed to go the front had behaved so "riotously" that the government was chary about issuing passes to civilian women'.²²¹ According to Lee, she resented the inconvenience caused by such foolish behaviour to the 'dull & venerable', among whom she seemed to include herself (*EW*, p.479). She had also indicated earlier to Mary Berenson, following a particularly harrowing visit to the hospital of the nerve specialist, Doctor Isch Wall, that she did not 'know anything ghastlier & more idiotic than "doing" hospitals *en touriste*, like museums!' (*LEW*, pp.346-7). Price interpreted her comment solely as criticism against 'society ladies', but Wharton explained to Berenson that the visit, which left her 'shattered', had followed a Sunday trip to Chartres' cathedral, described as 'more magically beautiful & appealing than ever'.²²² In this instance Wharton's critical eye seems turned as much on her own behaviour as on the war relief efforts of high-society ladies satirised in her fiction. In *The Marne: A Tale of the War* (1918) Mrs Belknap lacks the strength required for nursing, but considers taking 'convalescent officers for drives in the Bois'.²²³ In the end she settles for serving tea 'once or twice at a fashionable hospital, and, on the strength of this effort, obtained permission to carry supplies (in her own motor) to the devastated regions'.²²⁴ Another fictional American woman, this time a Rose Belknap – one cannot help but read the surname literally – also engages in war relief work in a recently discovered, unpublished manuscript for a short story, entitled 'The Field of Honour', and judged by Kelly to have been written between mid- and late 1918:

she'd been away, at a hospital in Brittany (they were all at hospitals in those first months), but her doctor had forbidden her to stay – the work was too exhausting – and so she had come back to Paris, and joined a group of friends who visited the wounded: "Les Consolatrices" they were called. It was awfully interesting and touching: she sat with the poor fellows, and took them fruit and flowers, and read aloud to them. [...] She did it every day, *regularly* [...] [and] had devised something like the Red Cross uniform, only pearl grey, and more becoming: she thought one ought to look one's best when one went on an errand of mercy.²²⁵

²²⁰ Ibid., pp.6-7.

²²¹ Price, p.43.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Edith Wharton, *The Marne: A Tale of the War* (Macmillan and Co.: London, 1918), p.26.

²²⁴ Ibid., pp.26-7.

²²⁵ Alice Kelly, 'The Field of Honour', *Times Literary Supplement*, 4 November 2015 <<https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/public/the-field-of-honour-2/>> [accessed 6 September 2017]; Edith Wharton, 'The Field of Honour', *Times Literary Supplement*, 6 November 2015 <<https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/public/the-field-of-honour/>> [accessed 6 September 2017].

Both characters' relief work lacks conviction, and in both cases their personal comfort is a central consideration, contrasting with Wharton's comparatively perilous forays into the military zone.

Someone else who was exasperated by volunteers who appeared to pose rather than do, was La Motte. Her first war assignment was at the American Hospital in Paris where 'she found a coterie of alleged do-gooders crowding out the recuperating soldiers', compelling her to join Borden's hospital in Belgium after only a few months.²²⁶ According to Hutchison, she there encountered 'ten-hour shifts and regular days off', 'wealthy volunteers who showed up for work wearing the family pearls', 'tea every day at three o'clock', and 'an abundance of clean sheets and medicine, of dressings and cigarettes for the patients'.²²⁷ Wharton would have been keen to distinguish herself from those satirised in her writing. She reported with some pride to James that the journalist, Henri de Jouvenel, 'was much amazed at my having succeeded in getting' to Verdun, saying that she was the first woman to visit there, and that she was told the same thing at the hospital itself (*LEW*, pp.349-50). She also emphasises her singular access in *Fighting France*, not because there were no other women at the front, but because she understood the uniqueness and appeal of the female eyewitness for readers back home.²²⁸ In this Wharton was not alone; Rinehart too made much of the fact that she was a woman at the front, as the subtitle of her 1915 account makes clear, along with numerous references to her unprecedented access.²²⁹ Far from being an inconspicuous member of the group, Kate McLoughlin remarked that Wharton's clothing was 'instantly anomalous', provoking the 'speechless astonishment of officers and men at the sight of a wandering woman'.²³⁰ Wharton would recall, years after the war and wittily, arriving among the *Chasseurs Alpins* of the French army in the Vosges, 'an eager grotesque figure, bestriding a mule in the long tight skirts of 1915 [...], a prosaic Walkyrie laden with cigarettes', when she renewed her acquaintance with one of those very 'Blue Devils' met 'on top of the Col de la Chapolette' (*ABG*, p.351). She could have opted for more practical and less feminine and splendid dress, but a photograph, entitled 'A French palisade', that appeared in *Fighting France* shows Wharton immaculately turned out in a hat and heels, leaning lightly on an umbrella and looking straight into the camera lens.²³¹ The image shows her as she appeared at the front, but also reminds her readers that they are hearing the voice of Edith Wharton. By presenting herself exactly as she would in any other context, Wharton prepared her

²²⁶ A. Scott Berg, 'Story of The Week: "Alone"', Library of America, 31 March 2017 <<http://storyoftheweek.loa.org/2017/03/alone.html>> [accessed 7 December 2017].

²²⁷ Hutchison, pp.141-2.

²²⁸ Prieto, "Without methods", p.175.

²²⁹ Ibid.; for example Rinehart, pp.102-3, 116, 123, 127, 131, 188, 191, 204-5, 286, 295.

²³⁰ McLoughlin, p.5.

²³¹ Edith Wharton, *Fighting France: From Dunkerque to Belfort*, ed. by Alice Kelly (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), p.77.

audience for her authentic, authoritative voice – and gifted those who met her at the front with an image to remember.

Prieto remarked that Tennyson Jesse was mocked for bringing unsuitable gear to the front by a male war correspondent, and adds that ‘one of the difficulties that these pioneer women had to face’ was not knowing ‘how to properly dress in the war zones’.²³² Rinehart left for France wearing a fur coat that served variously as her ‘lap robe, bed clothing and pillow’ but, during a night spent in the trenches, felt exposed by her khaki-coloured suit that ‘gleamed’ in the moonlight, and doubled in size by a ‘cape that ballooned like a sail in the wind’.²³³ Wharton, however, appears to have used her appearance to express visually her role as silence breaker at the front. She visited male-dominated spaces unapologetically as a woman of privilege, but also one entirely earnest in her attempts to aid and direct the war effort towards American participation, and so challenged expectations of the place and role of women.

2.8. *Making sense of the front*

Access to that which is strictly regulated or hidden does not ensure immediate understanding. Wharton sometimes admits to being confused by what she witnesses and tries openly to make sense of things. Tylee wrote:

Wharton herself had patiently driven hundreds of miles along the Western Front, from Dunkirk to Belfort on the Swiss border, braving bombardment and witnessing minor battles, in order to send back eyewitness reports. But this firsthand experience had not enabled her to make historical, political, or military sense of what met her eyes: ‘I could not understand where we were, or what it was all about,’ she concluded more than once.²³⁴

The full quotation from *Fighting France* ends with the words, ‘or why a shell from the enemy outpost did not suddenly annihilate us’ (p.100). Wharton’s admission is important. Despite her commitment to the Allied cause and keen desire for American involvement, she tells her readers about the indecipherability of war, even to those who observe it directly. Kelly drew attention to the frequency with which ‘Wharton is unaware of where the war zones start and end’ and her ‘sense of disorientation’, to the party losing their way on unmarked roads, and to ‘the civilian problem of knowing or comprehending exactly what the war *is*, or where to find it’.²³⁵ When initial understanding does dawn, Wharton is happy to exclaim ‘*This is war!*’ (p.22), although what she sees is only a part of the whole. It reflects the industrial nature of the conflict that Winter wrote about:

²³² Prieto, “Without methods”, p.172.

²³³ Rinehart, pp.9, 45, 125.

²³⁴ Tylee, ‘Imagining Women’, p.333.

²³⁵ Kelly, ‘Introduction’, pp.26-7; also see Prieto, “Without methods”, p.179.

Along the white road rippling away eastward over the dimpled country the army motors were pouring by in endless lines, broken now and then by the dark mass of a tramping regiment or the clatter of a train of artillery (p.22). Wharton's accounts are regularly punctuated by descriptions that inventorise the machinery – human and mechanical – of warfare and provide her readers with something definitive and concrete to latch onto. It involves a 'continual coming and going of alert and busy messengers, the riding up of officers (for some still ride!), the arrival of much-decorated military personages in luxurious motors, the hurrying to and fro of orderlies' (p.23); cavalrymen whose 'horses' flanks [...] [glint] like ripe chestnuts' (p.44); a 'river of war' consisting of '[c]avalry, artillery, lancers, infantry, sappers and miners, trench-diggers, road-makers, stretcher-bearers' (p.65); and 'numberless motor-vans, supply-wagons and Red Cross ambulances' with 'detachments of British artillery, clattering gun-carriages, straight young figures on glossy horses, long Phidian lines of youths' labouring through them (p.70). Her impulse to list what she sees spills over into 'You and You', where she remembers [a]irplanes and cannon, and rifles and tanks' (line 36). She also lists, and to a much greater extent, those American landscapes from which the war's human machinery, privates 'Jones and Robinson, Smith and Brown' (line 16) and 'Smith and Robinson, Brown and Jones' (line 37), was drawn, such as 'the piping prairie town' (line 17), 'the city's roaring blocks' (line 19), 'the bleak New England rocks' (line 20), 'the burning frontier-post' (line 24), 'the Klondyke's frozen flanks' (line 25).

Wharton may emphasise the material indicators of military prowess because they are so much in evidence along her travel route, because they accentuate the preparedness of those fighting on the side of good, and because they appeal to her sense of order. For Prieto certain vehicles, like ambulances and supply wagons also 'become indicators of the proximity of war' and their prominence in Wharton's account is a reminder to the reader that she is on a working visit.²³⁶ But they also accentuate the first-hand nature of the account. Wharton the writer of reportage is seeing war for herself and by listing its attributes, she makes it accessible to the outsider. Lists are comprehensible in a world of waiting, watching and hiding, of hurting and of being hurt, of trusting blindly, even of relishing, as Mark de Rond recently described – actions and emotions that resist easy interpretation by, and communication to, others.²³⁷ Wharton's undisguised difficulty in making sense of the war in practical terms lends her breaking of the gendered silence surrounding it an additional critical layer. She is not afraid to call attention to her struggle. Indeed, when she describes

²³⁶ Sara Prieto, 'Travelling Through Forbidden Zones: Comparing Edith Wharton's and Mary Roberts Rinehart's Experiences in the Great War', *Edith Wharton Review*, 28 (2012), 16-23 (p.18).

²³⁷ Mark de Rond, 'Embedded with medics in Afghanistan, I witnessed the fall out of war', *The Conversation*, 11 September 2017 <<https://theconversation.com/embedded-with-medics-in-afghanistan-i-witnessed-the-fall-out-of-war-83521>> [accessed 17 October 2017].

what she sees as ‘the greatest of paradoxes: the most senseless and disheartening of human retrogressions, and the stimulant of the qualities of soul which, in every race, can seemingly find no other means of renewal’ (pp.24-5), the complexity of her attitude is laid bare. She advocates war, but does so intelligently. In this respect, Blazek proposed an original interpretation of Wharton’s unusual use of metaphorical language that describes the French in terms of insect behaviour – French trenches, for example, appear to her as ‘the work of huge ants’ or ‘harmless traces of an historical camp’ (p.51) – which again indicates her difficulty in understanding what she sees.²³⁸ But he also wrote that her

picture of buildings destroyed along with their ancient social and cultural associations points to Wharton’s innovative efforts in war propaganda; for, in keeping her observations about the war strongly metaphorical and referential, she can better emphasize the real loss of civil life and the tearing of old bonds between people and the places where they life.²³⁹

For Blazek, Wharton accuses the Germans of ‘disrupting and threatening to erase the ordered, useful, ritualized daily life of France’, which are the intellectual and behavioural aspects of French civilization that Wharton values most, to conclude that she issued ‘not so much a call to arms [although it is that too] as a call to brains’.²⁴⁰

Wharton did not foresee, when she wrote so admiringly of France’s self-restraint, of Paris’ silent newsboys, that the war that had ‘announced herself by a great wave of stillness’ would last until the end of the decade. She could not have imagined how silence at street level would give way to official reticence regarding the progress and success of the war effort and its dire effects on military and civilian lives; to loss of hearing and speech and sense of self and reality among ex-combatants; and to the suppression, even reinvention of war experiences in the aftermath of the conflict.²⁴¹ Nor could she have anticipated that a war that started with silence would be memorialised with silence to facilitate mourning and healing.²⁴² She did, however, understand the power of keeping and breaking silence, as she demonstrates clearly, with different aims and effects, in her writing on the Great War.

III. EXOTIC SILENCES: *IN MOROCCO*

1. Introduction

The collection of ‘sketches’ published as *In Morocco* resulted from Wharton’s visit to this country between 15 September and 25 October 1917. One critical reading of the text establishes it as promotion on behalf of France. Written during the Great War, mirroring the

²³⁸ Blazek, ‘French Lessons’, p.13.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Nicolson, pp.64-5; Winter, *War*, pp.177-9; Jay Winter, ‘Thinking About Silence’, in *Shadows of War: The Social Construction of Silence*, ed. by Efrat Ben-Ze-ev, Ruth Ginio and Jay Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp.1-30 (p.6).

²⁴² For example, Nicolson, pp.139-49; Winter, ‘Thinking’, p.4.

format of *Fighting France*, and openly pro-French in its stance, this text may be read entirely plausibly as official propaganda – and as yet another demonstration of Wharton’s efficient use of public or cultural diplomacy, that targets not state representatives of foreign countries, but the general public.²⁴³ *In Morocco*’s undiluted praise for France’s colonial objectives and activities complements Wharton’s support for wartime France who, in her view, always has the moral upper hand. It is through this lens that I examine international tensions surrounding French intervention in Morocco and analyse Wharton’s attempts to convince her readers of the aptness of France’s actions. She focuses on improvements to Moroccan infrastructure made under the auspices of the French Protectorate and on measures to preserve Moroccan heritage, but fails to critique the political and economic agenda of French colonialism. In addition to promoting France, *In Morocco* is – against a backdrop of interlacing silences and sounds – a prime example of contemporary travel writing that reveals the ‘exotic other’ to western, especially Anglo-American, audiences.²⁴⁴ Here I purposely employ Rachid Agliz’s term, ‘exotic other’, to draw attention to the Orientalist discourse running through *In Morocco*; this discourse identifies the text as a product of the nineteenth-century tradition of American writing about the Arab-Muslim Middle East, summarised briefly by Marwan Obeidat and Nazmi al-Shalabi, as well as of Wharton’s study of existing writings on Morocco and north Africa more generally.²⁴⁵ Its dependence on the works of others, and its position within Orientalist literature in particular, draw attention to its status as an ‘imaginative rendering [...] of Arab North Africa’, rather than an ‘accurate and sympathetic understanding’.²⁴⁶ Wharton’s representation of Morocco also reinforces her argument for French colonial rule over it. Finally, I consider Wharton’s portrayal of women in Morocco, both outside and within the harem, with reference to her Orientalism and her exploration of female silencing. *Fighting France* largely exemplifies silence-breaking by a western woman of privilege during the Great War; it is a commanding demonstration of what is possible. *In Morocco*, in contrast, investigates the often oppressive power of silence over women at exactly the same historical moment; it constitutes a critique of what is, according to Wharton, in a non-western context. Taking into account Wharton’s complicated views on debates involving the socio-political situation of western women, outlined in the introductory chapter, I do not suggest that she advocates for legal changes to

²⁴³ Anon., ‘What is Cultural Diplomacy’, Institute for Cultural Diplomacy, n.d. <http://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/index.php?en_culturaldiplomacy> [accessed 22 August 2018]; Jan Melissen, ‘The New Public Diplomacy: Between Theory and Practice’, in *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations*, ed. by Jan Melissen (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp.3-27 (p.5); Joseph S. Nye, ‘Public Diplomacy and Soft Power’, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 616 (2008), 94-109.

²⁴⁴ Rachid Agliz, ‘The Exotic as Repulsive: Edith Wharton in Morocco’, *Arab World English Journal*, 2 (2014), 182-200 (p.191); F. Robert Hunter, ‘Manufacturing Exotica: Edith Wharton and Tourism in French Morocco, 1917-20’, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 46 (2010), 59-77 (p.59).

²⁴⁵ Agliz, pp.72-4; Marwan M. Obeidat and Nazmi al-Shalabi, ‘The Dark Side of the Moon: Edith Wharton’s Fictional Treatment of Islam in *In Morocco* and ‘The Seed of the Faith’’, *Edith Wharton Review*, 34 (2018), 33-46 (pp.34-5).

²⁴⁶ Obeidat and al-Shalabi, pp.35, 43.

women's rights in Morocco, but parallels between the status of women there and in the western home, as subsequently portrayed in *The Age of Innocence*, do not escape her either. *In Morocco* represents the novelist's most outspokenly 'feminist' text, although this interpretation does not eliminate the possibility that Wharton's condemnation of female subservience also feeds into imperialist, racist arguments for western intervention in Morocco. *In Morocco*, then, lends itself to multiple readings that, despite certain points of overlap, do not always co-exist in obvious harmony. My focus, however, is the common factor between them, namely Wharton's use of, or emphasis on, silence.

2. *In Morocco* as a propagandist text

Wharton and Berry visited Morocco by official invitation, chiefly to attend an annual trade fair in Rabat that exhibited ancient artisanal skills alongside industrial products, but also to travel more widely through the French protectorate, then administrated by General Louis-Hubert Lyautey (1854-1934), France's first Resident-General in Morocco (*EW*, p.509; *LEW*, p.401).²⁴⁷ She mentioned the invitation to André Gide (1869-1951) in August 1917, explaining that she would be 'conducted by auto from Tangier to Fez, Meknès, Rabat, and even [...] as far as Marrakech' and confirmed delightedly to Minnie Jones in late September that she writes from 'a fairy world, where a motor from the "Résidence" stands always at the door to carry us to new wonders & where every expedition takes one straight into Harun-al-Raschid land' (*LEW*, pp.397, 399). To extend the fantastical imagery, the motorcar represents 'the next best thing to a Djinn's carpet' (p.9) that lets the party float (Wharton's term) from one adventure to the next, including a 'wild flight across the desolate bled' (*LEW*, pp.399-400). They were driven by a military chauffeur and accompanied by a French staff officer, a certain 'Captain de M.' (p.44). Judith Funston viewed the three-week tour by motorcar rather romantically as Lyautey's 'recognition of her [Wharton's] relief work in France during the war' and Wharton does describe it as 'a real holiday' in her letter to Minnie Jones, but she was also there to work (*LEW*, p.401).²⁴⁸ I agree with Lee's claim that Wharton's invitation to Morocco, followed by a written account of what she witnessed, was an exercise in unadulterated, pro-French propaganda in which she appeared happy to participate. She both reveled in the special treatment and unique access afforded her, and quickly arranged to write a series of articles on her travels for Scribner's, followed by a book (*EW*, pp.509-11).

Control over Morocco represented a battleground for European powers in the years leading up to the Great War; the Second Moroccan or Agadir Crisis was indicative of international

²⁴⁷ Price, p.132.

²⁴⁸ Judith E. Funston, 'In Morocco: Edith Wharton's Heart of Darkness', *Edith Wharton Review*, 5 (1988), 1-3, 12 (p.1).

tensions preceding its outbreak. When the French intervened to help suppress a revolt in Fez in 1911, Germany retaliated via gunboat diplomacy, anchoring the *S.M.S. Panther* at the port of Agadir and triggering the crisis. Germany claimed that *der Panthersprung* was a bid to protect German citizens and commercial concerns in Morocco, but in reality it wished to assert its authority as a nation to be reckoned with at a time when the continent had been all but carved up between the European powers and imperial expansion in Africa was grinding to a halt. In view of the build-up of maritime power prior to the war, it is telling that the Agadir Crisis was a naval standoff. The *Entente Cordiale* obliged Britain to side with France, as it did during the First Moroccan Crisis (1905), despite the fact that French intervention had flouted terms of the Algeciras Agreement reached in 1906 and the Franco-German agreement on Morocco of 1909. The crisis was resolved when Germany agreed to the establishment of a French protectorate in Morocco in exchange for a portion of the French Congo as compensation, but it had suffered a diplomatic loss.²⁴⁹ In 1912 Lyautey again helped quell a nationalist uprising in Fez – ‘besieged by twenty thousand Berbers’, on the verge of a holy war, and about to be deserted by its ‘terrified Sultan’, according to Wharton (p.162); this action resulted in the finalisation of the establishment of the French protectorate (*LEW*, p.401). Rabat became the administrative capital, despite Fez’s status as Morocco’s oldest imperial city and its religious and cultural importance.²⁵⁰

Wharton and Lyautey had met in Paris, knew each other well, and counted among their shared acquaintances a number of writers and politicians, such as the Vicomte de Vogüé (1848-1910) and the Marquis de Segonzac (1867-1962) who spoke in France on behalf of Lyautey’s Moroccan policies (*EW*, pp.511-2). Wharton’s loyalty to France and her ‘deep concern for French culture and civilization, threatened by World War I at the time of her travels’ were indisputable, as were her abilities as propagandist.²⁵¹ Thus it was predictable that when Lyautey invited guests from Allied and neutral countries to Morocco to exhibit France’s ‘commitment to Moroccan development and conservation’, he included her to act as his colonial and highly literate ‘mouthpiece’ – a role that Lee described as ‘part of her willing contribution to the war effort’ (*EW*, p.511).²⁵² Written and serialised at the moment when she felt her beloved France most vulnerable, and promoting without hesitation French politics and culture, *In Morocco* may be rightly described as a Great War text. Wharton’s

²⁴⁹ Annika Mombauer, ‘World War 100: 1 July - The Agadir Crisis of 1911’, OpenLearn, 30 June 2011 <<http://www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/history/world-war-100-1-july-the-agadir-crisis-1911>> [accessed 9 February 2018]; Christopher Riches and Jan Palmowski, ‘Agadir’, in *A Dictionary of Contemporary World History* <<http://www.oxfordreference.com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780191802997.001.0001/acref-9780191802997-e-34?rskey=w980SN&result=8>> [accessed 9 February 2018].

²⁵⁰ Hunter, p.66.

²⁵¹ Charlotte Rich, ‘Edith Wharton and the Politics of Colonialism: The Good Public Relations of *In Morocco*’, *Edith Wharton Review*, 15 (1999), 8-13 (p.8).

²⁵² Sarah Bird Wright, *Edith Wharton’s Travel Writing: The Making of a Connoisseur* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), pp.103-4.

analysis of Lyautey's administration of Morocco also lends *In Morocco* a didactic flavour. While this is Wharton eagerly garnering support for the French war effort, she also holds up Lyautey's work in Morocco to her compatriots as an example of 'how to do' colonialism. The United States had been fostering a 'new transnational identity' due to a combination of 'overt expansionist efforts' and 'quieter imperialist operations' in various parts of the world.²⁵³ Following the Spanish-American war of 1898, it inherited control over a number of former Spanish territories, such as Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines.²⁵⁴ Wharton felt that 'the United States as a nation might benefit from the example of France's internationalism, an internationalism displayed in, among other things, its management of its colony in Morocco'.²⁵⁵

Lyautey's decision to invite Wharton was a diplomatic masterstroke. Her approval of all things French, including its imperialist *mission civilisatrice*, pioneered by the statesmen Jules Ferry (1832-1893), and how that was implemented by Morocco's Resident-General, could only help to legitimise French involvement in this country. In an 1884 address to the French Chamber of Deputies, Ferry claimed the right of 'higher races' over 'lower' ones in order to justify French colonial expansion for economic gain: '[...] the superior races have a right because they have a duty. They have a duty to civilize the inferior races...'.²⁵⁶ Driven by ever-present concerns over 'Europe such as it is today, in this competition of the many rivals we see rising up around us, some by military or naval improvements', he even suggested that 'a policy of withdrawal or abstention is simply the high road to decadence' – that to resist imperial 'expansion into Africa or the Orient' would be to risk 'sink[ing] from the first rank to the third and fourth'.²⁵⁷ The purported danger of falling into 'decadence' is of particular interest, because it suggests that France's civilising mission not only saves those who are inferior, but also ensures the survival of the saviours themselves.

In Morocco, Lyautey selected a form of indirect colonial rule that stood in contrast to the direct administration practised in Algeria that he strove to avoid.²⁵⁸ Christoffer Cappelen and Jason Sorens explained that Lyautey's approach in Morocco was exceptional among French administrators who normally 'made the chiefs politically subordinate to their political

²⁵³ Margaret Toth, 'Race and Imperialism', in *Edith Wharton in Context*, ed. by Laura Rattray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp.251-61 (p.252).

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Brian T. Edwards, 'The Well-Built Wall of Culture: Old New York and its Harems', in Edith Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*, ed. by Candace Waid (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003), pp.482-506 (p.488).

²⁵⁶ Jules François Camille Ferry, 'Speech Before the French Chamber of Deputies, March 28, 1884', in *Discours et Opinions de Jules Ferry*, ed. Paul Robiquet, trans. Ruth Kleinman (Paris: Armand Colin & Cie, 1897), pp.199-201, 210-1, 215-8 <<https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/1884ferry.asp>> [accessed 18 May 2021].

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Barnett Singer, 'Lyautey: An Interpretation of the Man and French Imperialism', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 26 (1991), 131-57 (p.134).

officers, tended to break up traditional governance units, and selected native rulers themselves rather than through traditional means'.²⁵⁹ Indeed, as outlined by Wharton, his approach included the use of military force to subdue rebellion against the sultan (p.162-3), but also a civil administration that employed 'native ability in the government of the country' (p.164); continued development of industry and agriculture during the war years (p.166); enlargement of the occupied territory through military action and peaceful negotiation (pp.167-8); and establishment of commercial ties through exhibitions in Casablanca, Fez and Rabat (pp.168-9). In addition to such developments that, in Wharton's view, displayed the extent to which French rather than German control over Morocco was essential during the war years, she admired Lyautey's sensitivity, for which there is historical evidence, towards the country's cultural heritage, his 'keen feeling for beauty', and his appreciation of Moroccan art that motivated him to gather 'archaeologists and artists who were charged with the inspection and preservation of national monuments' (p.170).²⁶⁰ *In Morocco* outlines all these achievements in a chapter entitled 'General Lyautey's work in Morocco' that appears towards the close of the text and that also summarises in report-form the French protectorate's work from 1912 to 1918 under the subheadings ports, commerce, justice, education, and medical aid (pp.171-6).

The facts and numbers listed in this abovementioned chapter support Wharton's narrative account, based on her own observations. As an experienced traveller and motorcar enthusiast, she was particularly impressed by the standard of French roads in Morocco. The French zone is 'as safe and open as the opposite shore of Spain' as a consequence of the 'energy and imagination of one of the greatest colonial administrators' (p.22). Its accessibility is due in no small part to 'thousands of miles of trail' and 'hundreds of miles of firm French roads' (p.22). Wharton's emphasis on roads recalls the centrality of road construction to the success of a much earlier colonial influence in Morocco, or what was then Mauretania, namely the Roman empire. Alcock and Cherry note with regard to this archetypal colonial power that 'well-engineered, phenomenally straight roads became a hallmark of the [Roman] imperial infrastructure'.²⁶¹ In contrast to that of the French, the industry of Morocco's Spanish administrators is portrayed as lagging by Wharton. The 'so-called Spanish zone, which encloses internationalized Tangier in a wide circuit of territory' is yet to be crisscrossed by 'good roads'; for the moment 'Spanish enterprise dies out after a few miles of macadam (as it does even between Madrid and Toledo)', which gives way to

²⁵⁹ Christoffer Cappelen and Jason Sorens, 'Pre-Colonial Centralisation, Traditional Indirect Rule, and State Capacity in Africa', *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 56 (2018), 195-215 (p.198).

²⁶⁰ For example, Lauren Wagner and Claudio Minca, 'Rabat Retrospective: Colonial Heritage in a Moroccan Urban Laboratory', *Urban Studies*, 51 (2014), 3011-25 (p.3014).

²⁶¹ Susan E. Alcock and John F. Cherry, 'The Mediterranean World', in *The Human Past: World Prehistory and the Development of Human Societies*, ed. by Chris Scarre (London: Thames & Hudson, 2013), pp.473-517 (p.507).

the *pistes* or old caravan trails (p.24). Of course *pistes* also occur in the French zone, but there ‘constant efforts are made to keep the trails fit for wheeled traffic’ (p.24). Roads even feature in Wharton’s correspondence. Minnie Jones is told almost straightaway that while the *piste* between Tangier and Rabat is being turned into a road, it ‘still necessitates a strong backbone like mine!’ (LEW, p.400). The role of French roads appears to be twofold in Wharton’s accounts. They bring order, ease, and protection against that which is unfamiliar, although sometimes just barely; ‘[i]n spite of the new French road’ the stony, red landscape between Rabat and Marrakech reminds her of evil djinns that present themselves in the shape of hot winds and sandstorms, and Africa’s ‘immensity and immobility’ that ‘descends on one with an intolerable oppression’ is only held at bay for so long as the road skirts the ‘Atlantic breakers’ (p.103). The notion that Moroccan roads have a protective function is intensified by the Conradian flavour of Wharton’s description of Africa. But as Wharton sees it, the roads also serve to make the unfamiliar known. She suggests without a hint of irony, although plenty of bias is in evidence, that without French roads the traveller would be exposed entirely to the work of Moroccan engineers (p.105) and to the limited efforts of the Spanish, unable to witness and reveal all that has lain hidden.

In Morocco is similarly outspoken in its praise of other perceived improvements wrought by the French, such as those relating to the preservation of Morocco’s heritage and including the original character of its urban centres. Wharton sharply criticises European colonists who ‘made short work of the beauty and privacy of old Arab towns in which they established themselves’ before Morocco ‘passed under the rule of the great governor’, Lyautey (pp.34-5). The construction of ‘warehouses, *cafés* and cinema-palaces’ inside the walls of old Tangier, Casablanca and Rabat is a particular sore point for her (p.35). She returns to this theme in a chapter entitled ‘Harems and Ceremonies’. ‘European “improvements”’ made to Rabat before Lyautey came to Morocco include ‘boulevards scored with tram-lines’ and ‘hotel-terraces and *cafés* and cinema-palaces’ that need to be passed before one reaches ‘the surviving nucleus of the once beautiful native town’ (p.144). The French refrained from subjecting Moroccan cities to such an ‘indignity’ (p.144). What becomes clear is that Wharton views the preservation of old Morocco as involving more than aesthetics. For her, construction of the modern colonist’s buildings within the walls of Morocco’s old towns was ‘the most impressive way of proclaiming his domination’ (p.35), an unmistakable and aggressive expression of power that might be expected of a Prussian Kaiser, but not of Lyautey. His resistance to such crassness becomes emblematic of his moral integrity, which demands that ‘[r]espect for native habits, native beliefs and native architecture is the first principle inculcated in the Civil Servants attached to his administration’ (p.35). In practice this principle was expressed by commissioning planners

of the urban design movement in Paris, *Le Musée Social*, to create separate living zones for the French and Moroccans by preserving ‘a historical and cultural Morocco-for-Moroccans alongside the founding of a modern Morocco for the French’.²⁶²

Fatima Mernissi’s (1940-2015) fictionalised childhood recollection of the ‘French Ville Nouvelle’, with its large straight streets and bright lights, reveals the gap between the colonial and local perspective on the French approach to built urban heritage. Born in a harem in Fez, she and those around her attributed French insistence on building a new city beyond the boundaries of the old town to fear, rather than respect, believing that ‘they were afraid to live in ours’.²⁶³ The streets of the *medina* were ‘narrow, dark, and serpentine – filled with so many twists and turns that cars could not enter. The low lighting did not bother its inhabitants, to whom it signified ‘a safe community’, but an outsider who had not grown up in the old town might easily have become lost in it.’²⁶⁴ Mernissi also recalled that local inhabitants of the *medina* like her father and uncle possessed mules for transport, while ‘poor people like Ahmed had only donkeys, and children and women had to walk’; indeed she remembered most people walking, in contrast to the French who ‘were always in their cars’, even the soldiers, ‘when things got bad’.²⁶⁵ The divergent local and Western values and understandings that characterise this issue exemplify the myriad misunderstandings that underlie the colonial experience, the Moroccan view interrogating, and casting doubt on, the perceptiveness of the colonial one, as expressed by Wharton.

Another such misunderstanding involves different interpretations of authenticity in heritage terms and the western preference for ‘expert’-driven cultural preservation, which often results in processes of ‘forced stagnation’ and museumification, such as those analysed by Lauren Wagner and Claudio Minca.²⁶⁶ This is something that Wharton also observes in Morocco, but refuses to regret. There lies ‘the lifeless hush of a museum’ (p.34) over the *medersa* (college) of the *kasbah* (citadel) of the Oudayas near Rabat. Like other *medersas* across Morocco, this one was ‘repaired with skill and precision’ and, being unused, turned into a museum of Moroccan art by the Ministry of Fine Arts that also includes a replica of a barber’s shop (pp.33-4). The outer gallery overlooks ‘orange-blossoms, roses, and the sea. It is all beautiful, calm, and harmonious’, and by Wharton’s own admission devoid of ‘life and local colour’ (p.34). In her view, however, it is not ‘a heap of undistinguished rubbish’ as it

²⁶² Wagner and Minca, p.3014.

²⁶³ Fatima Mernissi, *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), p.23.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁶ Wagner and Minca, pp.3013-5; also see Dennis Byrne, ‘Western Hegemony in Archaeological Heritage Management’, in *The Heritage Reader*, ed. by Graham Fairclough, Rodney Harrison, John H. Jameson Jnr. and John Schofield (London: Routledge, 2008), pp.229-34 (p.233).

would have been ‘but for French intervention’, ‘for plaster and rubble do not “die in beauty” like the firm stones of Rome’ (p.34). Similar restoration work is planned for the *medersa* in Salé, ‘the frailest, ghostliest of Medersas – mere carved and painted shell of a dead house of learning’ that ‘will never again be more than a show-Medersa, standing empty and unused’ (p.37).

Wharton’s satisfaction that spaces set aside for contemplation, reflection and learning are to be conserved, as well as her disappointment that they will in effect be lifeless, reflect her sensitivities about convents and monasteries elsewhere. In Fez she notes that the work of the French Fine Arts department has made *medersas*, that continue to be inhabited, accessible (pp.92-3), while it ensured her access to the mosque housing the tombs of the Saadian sultans in Marrakech (pp.121-2). To ensure that her readers grasp the degree to which Morocco relies on its colonial rulers for the preservation of its heritage, she explains that the Resident-General had been informed of the existence of the tombs by the current sultan’s government only because they were ‘falling apart’ and on ‘express condition that the French Government undertook to repair them’ (p.122). Today they are of particular interest to tourists who visit the *medina* of Marrakech. The old town was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1985.²⁶⁷ While such status as ‘official’ heritage amplifies its attraction as a tourist destination, it also formalises adherence to western heritage management frameworks, such as the Venice Charter (1964) for the conservation and restoration of monuments and sites. Thus protection of the tombs of the Saadian sultans, initiated by the French colonial government, has meant effectively freezing them in time.

Postcolonial readings of the text aside, *In Morocco* was a competent piece of propaganda, outspoken in its approval of the country’s French administration, while maintaining certain thematic silences. Following the standard colonial narrative, as already demonstrated, *In Morocco* presents the coloniser as the benefactor and the colonised as the beneficiary. Wharton attributes the vying of European powers to ‘assert their respective ascendancies’ in Morocco to the ‘confusion of an ungoverned country’, and claims that the ‘demoralized condition of the country justified these attempts, and made European interference inevitable’ (pp.196-7). The morality of a colonial administrator who by some accounts starved ‘tribesmen by driving them out of their pastures, machine-gunning any who tried to work in the fields, and finally burning their villages’, is never questioned, nor that of a European nation wishing to establish itself in an African one – this despite Morocco’s widely recognised independence, established formally in 1880 through the Conference of Madrid,

²⁶⁷ Anon., ‘Medina of Marrakech’, UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2018 <<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/331>> [accessed 3 September 2018].

and Wharton's condemnation of Prussian imperialism in Europe.²⁶⁸ She presents the efforts of the prospective coloniser to establish itself in another country when control in said country disintegrates, as reasonable.

This line of argument epitomises the 'trope of "affirmation" in colonial texts'; Charlotte Rich quoted David Spurr who described it as 'that element in colonial discourse which continually returns to an idealization of the colonialist enterprise against the setting of emptiness and disorder by which it has defined the other'.²⁶⁹ The authority of those in power is justified by such affirmations that, ultimately, demonstrate their superiority in a moral sense.²⁷⁰ To strengthen the case for France's involvement in Morocco even further, Wharton emphasises that its protectorate was established at the request of the sultan Abd-el-Hafid who desired France's military aid (pp.161, 197). According to the Convention of Fez, a French Resident-General would reside in Morocco 'with authority to act as the Sultan's sole representative in treating with the other powers' (p.161). In addition to political and military stability, the French protectorate brought Morocco progress in the spheres of commerce, infrastructure, justice, education, health and heritage in Wharton's account. The view of Morocco as beneficiary seems corroborated in her text when the sultan's mother asks Mrs Lyautey 'for news of the war' and then asserts that '[a]ll is well with Morocco as long as all is with France' (p.141). The entirely biased nature of her perspective – that of an 'Empress Mother' whose son's position is protected against rebel tribes 'outside the Blad-el-Makhzen or *governed country*' (p.197) by French involvement in Morocco – is left unacknowledged. It is presented, instead, as an expression of solidarity with France only.

The text is devoid of any indication that Moroccans may not welcome the continued French presence although it is possible that Wharton, chauffeured and chaperoned by a military escort, was not exposed to evidence of dissent during her visit. Mernissi compared German occupation of Paris during the Second World War directly to what 'the French were doing to us in Fez', when they 'started giving people orders'.²⁷¹ Wharton also fails to critique, but does nod towards the benefits of its presence in Morocco to France. She notes that, prior to the French protectorate's establishment, Germany was 'coveting the certain agricultural resources and the conjectured mineral wealth of Morocco' (p.197). In the years following, 'German intrigue and native conspiracies' continued in the 'disastrously misgoverned Spanish zone' (p.164). She concludes that sending all available troops to France in 1914, as

²⁶⁸ Theodore Zeldin, *A History of French Passions 1848-1945: Intellect, Taste and Anxiety* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p.925.

²⁶⁹ Rich, p.8.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Mernissi, *Dreams*, p.94.

ordered by the French government, ‘would have been to give France’s richest colonies outright to Germany at a moment when what they could supply – meat and wheat – was exactly what the enemy most needed’ (p.165). What attracted Germany and other powers to Morocco was also what attracted France to Morocco, that is, its wealth in resources and its geographical location as gateway to the Mediterranean, as well as to French North Africa. Wharton makes clear that the ‘loss of Morocco would inevitably have been followed by that of the whole of French North Africa’ (p.165). Regardless of how enlightened Lyautey’s policies may have been – and not all contemporary or historical evaluations agree that they were – this does not change the fact that France, like any other European power, sought colonial expansion for international influence and financial profit.²⁷²

3. *In Morocco* as travel writing

Morocco’s prospects as a tourist destination represented an additional potential source of monetary income to France. Robert Hunter’s work has focused on Lyautey’s objective to establish tourism, formally initiated on 28 May 1918, as a new industry in Morocco. He analysed the influence of *In Morocco*, which was finalised around the same time that its Orientalist and French colonialist ideas and images were employed independently by those developing Morocco’s tourist industry, on this process.²⁷³ Thus *In Morocco* is more than just a propagandist text that represents France as altruistic benefactor and Morocco as grateful beneficiary. It presents itself primarily as travel writing – pointedly not as a guidebook. Wharton’s preface to the text claims that travel conditions prohibited the ‘leisurely study of the places visited’ required by the author of a guidebook (p.9), and at least one contemporary reviewer welcomed the outcome: ‘her book would have lost in broad suggestiveness far more than it would have gained from precision in detail’.²⁷⁴ Funston too suggested that *In Morocco* is ‘not so much a guidebook, as it is a collection of sketches’.²⁷⁵ As such it invites its readers to find their own ‘truths’, and to do so by visiting Morocco. Hunter contended that while there had been studies published about Moroccan politics, religion and ethnography, its ‘art, architecture, and folkways’ had been overlooked, and that this ‘was the gap that her [Wharton’s] personal observations, hurried and impressionistic as they would be, might fill’.²⁷⁶

Wharton’s account is that of an authoritative eyewitness. This impression is deepened by her openly expressed ambivalence over the country’s tourist potential. She writes in her preface

²⁷² Also see, Rich, pp.10-1; Tuttleton, Lauer and Murray, p.301.

²⁷³ Hunter, pp.60, 74.

²⁷⁴ Tuttleton, Lauer and Murray, p.299.

²⁷⁵ Funston, p.1.

²⁷⁶ Hunter, p.61.

to *In Morocco*: ‘Morocco is too curious, too beautiful, too rich in landscape and architecture, and above all too much of a novelty, not to attract one of the main streams of spring travel as soon as Mediterranean passenger traffic is resumed’ (p.10). She realises wistfully that the French roads that have facilitated her own journey through this country, eventually will unleash ‘the great torrent of “tourism”’; Morocco will become a regular stopping point for visitors to the Mediterranean and their presence will transform its character – ‘no eye will ever again see Moulay Idriss and Fez and Marrakech as I saw them’ (p.10).²⁷⁷ She does not, however, admit that *In Morocco* itself would bring these attractions to the attention of prospective travellers, and she remains silent too about the economic benefits of tourism in Morocco to France. A renowned author’s compelling description of the increasingly accessible ‘exotic’ Orient, produced in tandem with the ‘approach of the “Circular Ticket”’ (p.10), could have little other outcome. Those interested in such a ticket would, inevitably, have included Americans eager to travel to the world of Scheherazade, especially if it was one with whom the United States had had a ‘treaty of peace and friendship’ since 1786, and full diplomatic relations since 1905.²⁷⁸

In addition to downplaying Wharton’s complicity in Morocco’s impending commercialisation, *In Morocco* makes peculiar use of sounds and silence. Sometimes an interplay between the two characterises Wharton’s revelations. The quiet of Salé’s *medersa* is contrasted against the bustle of the market outside its walls whose ‘draped, veiled, turbaned mob’ is described as ‘shrieking, bargaining, fist-shaking’ until ‘struck with the mysterious Eastern apathy, sinking down in languid heaps of muslin among [...] the fluttering hens, the tethered goats, the whinnying foals’ (p.38). Humans and animals are collapsed into one noisy, chaotic and inexplicable collective. Likewise, on their way to the Fez Elbali, Wharton sees lanes ‘packed with people, others as deserted as a cemetery’ (p.79), bazaars filled with ‘profane noise and crowding and filth’ (p.83), and the ‘profound and secretive silence of a quarter of well-to-do dwelling houses, where only a few veiled women [...] moved noiselessly over the clean cobblestones, and the sound of fountains and runnels came from hidden courtyards and over garden-walls’ (p.79).

At Moulay Idriss the party progresses through something comparable to religious silence – of the kind that would have reigned at her own French convent-château when it still served as a spiritual institution – into sound. Its entrance quarter is ‘deserted’, and they walk on ‘without meeting anyone, to the Street of the Weavers, a silent narrow way between low

²⁷⁷ Ibid., pp.61-2.

²⁷⁸ Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, ‘U.S. Relations With Morocco’, U.S. Department of State, 19 July 2018 <<https://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5431.htm>> [accessed 3 September 2018].

whitewashed niches like the cubicles in a convent' (p.50). Each niche is occupied by a 'grave white-robed youth', weaving grain baskets out of straw and, vine leaves and grape clusters in abundance, resembles the 'unrolled frieze of a white Etruscan vase patterned with black vine garlands'; 'silence and emptiness' is all around (p.51). The implication is evident; the niches in this silent street have been occupied by basket-weaving youths for time immemorial. Wharton not only reveals the unknown 'exotic' present to readers who, as Edward Said would have argued, seek to understand their own place in the world via comparison with the Other; she also casts light on an unknown past that reaches right into this present, drawing on European, sometimes classical, constructs and motifs – Rome's stones, Etruria's ware – to make it knowable even as she reduces human beings to objects of material culture.²⁷⁹ Said's characterisation of Orientalism as 'a tissue of intertexts through which the present becomes a void to be filled with myth and legend and imaginative projections', as Mary Schriber put it, seems especially apt in this context.²⁸⁰ With her reader on familiar ground, Wharton then discloses that which has no recognisable parallel, namely the dance of the Hamadchas. The 'lament of the *rekka* [...] accompanied by a wild thrum-thrum of earthenware drums and a curious excited chanting of men's voices' (p.51) is all the more remarkable for the silence that gives way to it. Here Wharton's language expresses the strangeness of what she witnesses, and her reaction to its distinctly African, rather than Arab, nature; the Hamadchas are 'savage', the spectacle that they create is a 'bestial horror', the patterns painted on the earthenware drums 'barbaric' (pp.55-6). These terms achieve the 'defamiliarisation of the North African landscapes' that Agliz wrote about.²⁸¹ The dance is a 'blood-rite'; 'the dancers hacked in their own skulls and breasts', 'forming fresh pools [of blood] among the stones', but the bleeding is done exclusively by 'humble, blue-shirted' 'negroes' [sic] (p.56). Their sacrifice mimics the actions of the faithful slave of the seventeenth-century saint, Hamadch, who committed suicide after his master's death and, Wharton realises,

enables the devotees to divide their ritual duties into two classes, the devotions of the free men being addressed to the saint who died in his bed, while the slaves belong to the slave, and must therefore simulate his horrid death (p.57).

Kassanoff interpreted Wharton's reaction to the class and racial distinctions of the ritual as one of relief.²⁸² I am not persuaded by this reading, although the ease and rapidity with which the narrative moves on from the discriminatory nature of the dance to the party's departure and need to find lodging for the night is striking. Having exposed the inequity,

²⁷⁹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p.332; also see *EW*, p.443 for a similar reading of Wharton's observations during a voyage to Tunisia and Algeria in 1914.

²⁸⁰ Mary Suzanne Schriber, 'Edith Wharton and the Dog-Eared Travel Book', in *Wretched Exotic: Essays on Edith Wharton in Europe*, ed. by Katherine Joslin and Alan Price (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), pp.147-64 (p.161).

²⁸¹ Agliz, p.196.

²⁸² Kassanoff, p.192.

Wharton resists further comment. She does, however, explore culturally specific variations of what she has observed at Moulay Idriss in other social settings, in other texts written during or shortly after the Great War, such as *Summer* and *The Age of Innocence*. Funston argued that in the latter text, Wharton portrays Old New York as practising ‘tribal rituals as destructive as the dance of the Hamadchas’, although there the taking of a life is not accompanied by a physical outpouring of blood.²⁸³ Her apparent silence on the matter, then, may be better described as a pause.

Another way in which Wharton makes peculiar use of silence in *In Morocco*, is when she notes it as the defining characteristic of a place. At ruined Meknes, with which ‘the living held no further traffic’, she is struck by the ‘vastness, the silence, the catastrophic desolation of the place’ (pp.63-4), and the mystery of its remains. Archaeologists ‘disagree as to the uses of the crypt of rose-flushed clay’; ‘[w]ere these the vaulted granaries, or the subterranean reservoirs under the three miles of stabling which housed the twelve thousand horses?’ (p.64). There is a note of desperation in her assertion that the ‘stables, at any rate, were certainly near this spot’ (p.64). Despite her status as eyewitness, in the tradition of John Windus who travelled to Meknes in 1721 and ‘saw the imperial palaces and their builder with his own eyes’ (p.68), the exact nature of what she sees resists full understanding. The silent past eludes her, possibly because it is truly inscrutable, possibly in order to hold her readers captive – to encourage them to go and see for themselves. Morocco as exotic enigma is exemplified further by Wharton’s glimpse of the municipal lamp-lighters of Marrakech. Lodging at the Bahia, yet another Moroccan palace formally occupied by its Resident-General, she is awakened ‘one morning just at daylight [...] by a soft tramp of bare feet’ that belongs to a ‘procession of eight tall negroes in linen tunics’, ‘silhouetted against the cream-coloured walls’ and filing ‘noiselessly across the atrium like a moving frieze of bronze’ (p.110). Then a cock crows and they vanish. This account, like the one of Meknes, overflows with a sense of strangeness that is heightened by the absence of any sound that might anchor it within the present and that reinforces the impression of having travelled not only to a foreign place but also a foreign time.²⁸⁴ As in her account of Moulay Idriss, the living is likened to lifeless, ancient artefacts. Wharton’s implication, that the past is never too far away in Morocco, was described by Hunter as encapsulating ‘the African Middle Ages [...] [that] carried with it the idea of changelessness’, consisting of ‘recurrent cycles of instability and despotism’.²⁸⁵ Nineteenth-century Orientalism as ‘an idea of the exotic [...] associated with sensuous images, vivid colours, warm weather, and new smells and sounds’,

²⁸³ Funston, p.3.

²⁸⁴ Schriber, p.161.

²⁸⁵ Hunter, pp.71-2.

but also as one ‘providing relief from the pressures of industrial life’ has a prominent place in Wharton’s portrayal of Morocco in the present as indistinguishable from Morocco in the past.²⁸⁶ Indeed this is why Wharton is fervent in her belief that Moroccans, who are ‘still only a people in the making’, need France, and that ‘the political stability which France is helping them to acquire will at last give their higher qualities time for fruition’ (p.128).

4. *In Morocco* as a ‘feminist’ text

Wharton’s focus on her primary aims to produce a pro-French text that also serves as travel writing is not maintained throughout *In Morocco*. It slips noticeably when she reaches Chapter V, entitled ‘Harems and Ceremonies’ and is extraordinary in its critical view of the position of Moroccan women living in harems. Lucas Tromly suggested that this censure is a facet of Wharton’s pro-colonial stance, used to strengthen the argument for French intervention in Morocco, but I argue that this emotive part of her account overshadows and even distracts from its propagandist purpose.²⁸⁷

First it is worth lingering over portrayals of women elsewhere in *In Morocco* to demonstrate earlier observations that inform Wharton’s expectations. When her party sets out from Tangier she is struck by how quickly Europe and its influences fade away. A list of features that emphasises the replacement of the familiar ‘prosaic’ by the exotic ‘picturesque’ includes the significance of every human figure that appears in the ‘*bled*, the immense waste of fallow land and palmetto desert: an earth as void of life as the sky above it of clouds’ (p.25). Wharton encounters a veiled woman who is ‘heading a little cavalcade from the south’, and ‘through the eye-slits in the grave-clothes muffling her’, she discerns ‘[a]ll the mystery that awaits’ them (p.26). Here, at the start of her journey through Morocco, a speechless, veiled woman comes to symbolise all that is still unknown, that which is to be revealed. Wharton cannot resist the urge to contextualise the woman and her companions in terms of the past: ‘[t]here is no break in the links; these wanderers have looked on at the building of cities that were dust when the Romans pushed their outposts across the Atlas’ (p.26). The image of a traveller who has passed through time into the present is reinforced by the description of the woman’s dress as grave clothes. Painting this scene, Wharton stumbles too upon the colonial notion that Africa, or large swathes of it at least, is one thing, and suggests that its desert-dwellers may be one people. She asks about the little group of travellers:

Where have they come from, where are they going, all these slow wayfarers out of the unknown? [...] interminable distances unroll behind them, they breathe

²⁸⁶ Hunter, p.72.

²⁸⁷ Lucas Tromly, ‘The small talk of the harem’: Discursive Communities and Colonial Silences in Edith Wharton’s *In Morocco*, *Studies in Travel Writing*, 13 (2009), 239-50 (p.242).

of Timbuctoo and the farthest desert. Just such figures must swarm in the Saharan cities, in the Soudan and Senegal (p.26). Colonialism did carve up Africa, but as Kapuściński pointed out, it was also a 'brutal unification brought about by fire and sword! Ten thousand entities were reduced to fifty'.²⁸⁸ Indeed, colonialism was blind to Africa's 'underlying variety, this mosaic – this shimmering collage of pebbles, bones, shells, bits of wood, pieces of tin, and leaves' – as is Wharton, when she turns the muffled woman and her companions into a sign for all those who travel through the Sahara.²⁸⁹ Despite being so used, the unspeaking woman wields power, heads a cavalcade, and is irrefutably free as she roams the desert. In this she exemplifies the contrasts that Wharton draws between the desert and the city 'to convey her impressions of the country'.²⁹⁰ The spectral image of a line of figures led by a silent woman through what appears to be a desolate landscape stands in opposition to the stiflingly closed atmosphere and female atrophy that Wharton will encounter in Morocco's harems.

In Morocco portrays women in a number of other instances if not as thinking and behaving independently, then at least as having lives beyond that of the stereotyped, city-dwelling harem member. The ritual dance of the Hamadchas in Moulay Idriss is a crowd-pleaser. Above the square 'the crowded roofs, terraces and balconies packed with women in bright dresses looked like a flower-field on the edge of a marble quarry' (p.53). Wharton notes the general rarity of seeing women in Moroccan streets or bazaars, apart from 'the humblest classes, household slaves, servants, peasants from the country or small tradesmen's wives'; in reality, then, seeing women in public is far from uncommon, but seeing women 'of the richer classes, mercantile or aristocratic, [who] never leave their harems except to be married or buried', is unusual (p.53). The women looking down on the dance are described as a 'throng [...] dressed in light colours', 'mauve and rose and pale green, with long earrings and jewelled headbands flashing through their parted veils', rather than the otherwise 'prevailing grave-clothes' (pp.53-4). Indeed, on this occasion the 'feminine population seizes the opportunity to burst into flower on the housetops' (p.53). Wharton's picturesque prose here is mirrored when she describes further rooftop activity, in Marrakech. As the sun sets people appear 'on the roofs: it was the hour of peace, of ablutions, of family life on the house-tops. Groups of women in pale tints and floating veils spoke to each other from terrace to terrace' (p.120).

Her portrayals of women of 'the humblest classes' are equally evocative, but often include menacing undertones and draw eagerly on the Orientalist trope of heightened vivacity and

²⁸⁸ Ryszard Kapuściński, *The Shadow of the Sun: My African Life* (Penguin Books, 2002), p.323.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Funston, p.2.

sensuality. In Marrakech, bazaars are frequented by ‘lusty slave-girls with earthen oil-jars resting against swaying hips’ and ‘bare-legged Berber women, tattooed and insolently gay’ who, together with ‘[f]anatics in sheepskins’, ‘fierce tribesmen’, ‘mad negroes’ and ‘consumptive Jews with pathos and cunning in their large eyes and smiling lips’ contribute to ‘an atmosphere of mystery and menace’ (pp.112-3). The chief of the guild of wool-merchants and his guests who are visiting the *menara* (minaret), ‘a little pleasure-house’ next to one of the reservoirs outside the city, are served by ‘a young black slave-girl with hoop-earrings and a green-and-gold scarf about her hips’ and entertained by ‘singing-girls [...], squat round-faced young women heavily hennaed and bejewelled’ (pp.115-6). The sandstorm that sweeps across Jemaa el-Fna strips ‘to the hips the black slave-girls scudding home from the *souks*’ (p.119). The bazaar outside the walls of Sefrou, a town just below the Atlas Mountains, is ‘swarming with hill-people’ from ‘un-Arab Morocco, with Berbers of the *bled* and the hills, whose women know no veils and seclusion, and who, under a thin surface of Mohammedanism, preserve their old stone and animal worship, and all the gross fetishistic beliefs from which Mohammed dreamed of freeing Africa’ (pp.96-7). Here bargaining women with ‘thin faces painted in stripes and patterns of indigo’ regard the visitors ‘with brilliant hennaed eyes and smiles that lifted their short upper lips maliciously’ (p.97). They wear silver around their throats, long earrings, ‘wool-embroidered kerchiefs bound about their temples with a twist of camel hair’, and ‘cotton shifts that fastened on their shoulders with silver clasps’, leaving their legs bare to the knee, or covered in protective leather leggings (p.97). As it is a Jewish feast-day, the ‘Hebrew stalls’ are closed, but through the *mellah* (Jewish quarter) throng ‘young women with plump white faces and lovely eyes, turbaned in brilliant gauzes, with draperies of dirty curtain muslin over tawdry brocaded caftans’ (p.99). Behind them ‘swarmed’ children and, ‘waddling in the rear, their unwieldy grandmothers, huge lumps of tallowy flesh who were probably still in the thirties’ (p.99).

This is Wharton at her most observant, and disapproving, or to use Funston’s terms, at her most eager to investigate, and her most morally indignant.²⁹¹ Her anthropological eye – responsible for enriching the critique surrounding society’s reception of newcomers, upstarts or outsiders and the weaknesses of its established members, running through her fiction – fastens on every detail of female dress and behaviour in Morocco, but she struggles to remain objective, often interpreting what she witnesses from a western, and classist, perspective. Slave girls with swaying hips are lusty; Berber women with bare legs are insolent; those from the hills smile maliciously. Her fascination with Moroccan women and

²⁹¹ Funston, p.1.

their lives is undeniable, as Lee pointed out, but so is the frequent sense of distaste, exemplified by the unflattering description of Jewish grandmothers and contrasting with her comparatively sympathetic rendering of *The Age of Innocence*'s Mrs. Manson Mingott. Mrs. Manson Mingott does not waddle or carry about lumps of flesh. Instead, an 'immense [mid-life] accretion of flesh' has turned her into 'something as vast and august as a natural phenomenon' (p.18). Shortly after creating Mrs. Manson Mingott, Wharton would have Mark Inwood of the 'The Happy Isles' observe a 'waddling bedizened Jewess' attending 'a party of veiled beauties, said to be Georgians on their way to the Sultan of Morocco' on the Toulon quay.²⁹² Wharton's acerbic comments about the women *en route* to a Jewish feast day in Fez represent an unpleasant combination of anti-Semitic and misogynistic thinking that recurs in her writing, but do not change the fact that she observes a rich diversity of female existence in Morocco. The vibrancy of women in the public eye may explain her dismay over what she witnesses inside privileged households (*EW*, pp.512-3).

Funston called the chapter on ceremonies and harems 'the core of *In Morocco* in that Wharton probes the heart of darkness of Moroccan culture, a culture predicated on male tyranny and female enslavement'.²⁹³ I agree with her view that 'Wharton's feminism distinguishes this book from the typical collection of travel sketches', and that in Chapter V in particular 'the artist bows to the feminist'.²⁹⁴ Funston's emphasis on enslavement is critical, though. It is the constrained mobility of women in the harems that she visits, that allows Wharton to move beyond her criticism of Moroccan women's physical and behavioural differences, as analysed above, to express concern on their behalf. A striking aspect of this change in gear is her recurring commentary on the silencing of women in her description of a series of visits to harems in various cities. The reader learns that the 'Sultan has sent word to Mme. Lyautey that the ladies of the Imperial harem would entertain her and her guests' after observing the rite of the Aïd-el-Kebir or Sacrifice of the Sheep (pp.130, 135). The party is conducted through a labyrinth of archways, inner passages, patios, long corridors, narrow staircases and landings into the harem's upper chamber, located in a tower, by a succession of 'shabbily dressed negress[es] [sic]', the chief eunuch and three graces – princesses 'out of an Arab fairy-tale' (p.136). Wharton records smiling and dimpling and blushing during their passage, but no talking. However, as soon as the door to the *mirador* is opened, they are enveloped 'by a dozen houris [attractive maidens], laughing, babbling, taking us by the hand, and putting shy questions' (p.137). The visitors' (own) interpreter whispers that these are the Sultan's "'favourites", round-faced apricot-tinted girls in their

²⁹² 'The Happy Isles' corrected typescript. Series I, Box 17, Folder 497.

²⁹³ Funston, p.1.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.1, 4.

teems [sic], with high cheek-bones, full red lips, surprised brown eyes [...] and little brown hands fluttering out like birds' (pp.137-8, 154). Soon though there is 'a flutter in the aviary' when the sultan's sad-eyed but legitimate daughter arrives to be surrounded by the 'humming-birds' (p.139). Being shy, and lacking conversation, she seats herself 'in silence, letting the others sparkle and chatter' (p.139). When the sultan's mother, she who seeks France's continued prosperity, finally arrives and speaks 'a few words', Wharton feels 'that at last a painted window of the *mirador* had been broken, and a thought let into the vacuum of the harem' (p.141). She is not surprised to discover that the woman whose honesty is 'manifest [...] [in her] voice and smile', and whose 'depth of [...] soul had air and daylight in it' is the sultan's most trusted adviser and 'the chief authority in the palace' (p.141). Despite her sustained imagery of birds in a gilded cage, Wharton may be persuaded that the sultan's is 'the happiest harem in Morocco, as well as the only one into which a breath of the outer world ever came' (p.143). Crucially, women favoured by the sultan are able to speak, even if their speech is limited or idle; some of them are even heard.

This contrasts with her experience of the harem of a government official in Rabat where the host's brother-in-law hovers over the conversation, despite the presence of a French-born interpreters who had purportedly studied in Algeria (p.145). The soberly dressed women with vacuous faces are primarily interested in discovering whether Wharton has any children; '[t]hey asked it all at once', before one ventures to explain that, "[i]n Islam [...] a woman without children is considered the most unhappy being in the world" (p.146). When Wharton replies that it is the same in the west, the brother-in-law takes charge of the conversation by smiling 'incredulously' and responding, incongruously, to her request for their views on the dress of western women (p.146). He also speaks for the women in the room when asked whether they do not wish to travel or visit the bazaar, indicating that they would not. The reason for his insistence was made clear by Mernissi's characterisation of women in the street as 'trespassing' in the world of men. She added that, traditionally, no respectable woman was seen on the street and that women walking freely in the street had to be either insane, or prostitutes. This explains why calling a woman a maid is a common local insult in Morocco; maids, at the bottom of the social order, through necessity leave the home to work. Moroccan women wear the veil when they go into the street in order to become invisible while trespassing.²⁹⁵ Similar conceptual restrictions apply in the countryside, although as Mernissi's maternal grandmother Yasmina explained to her, there the harem does not need to be demarcated by physical frontiers, because there are no passersby. Women are able to go out into the fields, to walk or to ride unveiled. If they ever happen to

²⁹⁵ Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp.142-4.

encounter a male peasant, 'he would cover his head with the hood of his own *djellaba* [robe] to show that he was not looking'.²⁹⁶ 'All this time the fair-haired interpretest had not been allowed by the vigilant guardian of the harem in Rabat to utter a word' and when she does speak, Wharton discovers that she has, despite her education, not only little French, but also little understanding of European geography (pp.146-7). Instead she reveals the 'powerful imprint' of the harem through 'the same remote and passive eyes as the daughters of the house' (p.147). The fact that the harem is a mental as much as a physical construct, "inscribed under your forehead and under your skin", as explained by Mernissi's grandmother, bears out this reading of its lasting influence offered by Wharton.²⁹⁷

As Wharton sketches the position of women in Moroccan harems, her tone becomes increasingly morose and her perception of their existence increasingly dark, noting that the 'farther one travels from the Mediterranean and Europe the closer the curtains of the women's quarters are drawn' (p.154). She speculates about the lives of young girls before being bought and 'transferred to the painted sepulchre of the harem' at the whim of a 'fat vizier or his pale young master', and considers that the worst fate must belong to 'those who go from tents and cedar forests, or from some sea-blown garden above Rabat, into one of the houses of Old Fez' (p.148). She notes that 'Fazi dignitaries do not welcome the visits of strange women' (p.148). Because Wharton is a foreign woman, a son or brother-in-law acts as interpreter, but she also accedes that it may be better if nobody reminds 'these listless creatures that somewhere the gulls dance on the Atlantic and the wind murmurs through olive-yards and clatters the metallic fronds of palm-groves' (pp.148-9). Wharton's portrayals of Fazi harems indicate the comparative desirability of Yasmina's harem of the mind which allows women freedom of movement that is unimaginable to those she visits in the city.

Freya Stark's (1893-1993) 1929 account of a harem at Rihane, near Damascus, sounds not so different from Yasmina's. Its six female occupants 'can get out to the stables, but are careful to call out before doing so and ask if there is a man about', and her visit is punctuated by regular walks in their company.²⁹⁸ In the afternoon they visit the fields that are to be sown, 'dusty with the end of summer; the low ditches filled with iris leaves and lined with mint and yellow flowers; the groves of olives here and there [...]; the lines of apricots and walnuts, and sown or harvested land in between'.²⁹⁹ *East is West* (1945), Stark's account of her experiences in Egypt, Palestine and Syria as a member of the British Ministry of Information during the Second World War, mentions her numerous chaperoned visits to

²⁹⁶ Mernissi, *Dreams*, p.62.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., p.61.

²⁹⁸ Freya Stark, *Beyond Euphrates: Autobiography 1928-1933* (London: John Murray, 1951), p.77.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., p.78.

household harems in order to rouse Arab support for the Allies, or to encourage neutrality in the war. She finds herself always using the 'ladies' entrance' or the 'small harem doorway', that may include dark staircases opening up into 'high sunny rooms deep in carpets'.³⁰⁰ Despite their emphasis on seclusion and separation, her descriptions never match those of Wharton's entries in Moroccan harems in terms of their threatening gloom.

While Wharton's passage into the chambers of the sultan's harem seems labyrinthine and quiet, the party's entrance into the harem of a chief dignitary in Fez is a veritable 'descent into hell', according to Funston.³⁰¹ There Wharton finds seated on divans 'seven or eight passive-looking women over whom a number of pale children scrambled' (p.151). She is particularly struck by the younger women's apathy; she is interested to discover whether they have a garden, but they indicate that the rooftop, surrounded by other rooftops surrounded by 'naked fortified mountains which stand [...] like prison-walls', is their only outside space (pp.151-2). Some two decades later this reality would be confirmed by Mernissi's mother remarking after the family's annual springtime picnic in the country: "[w]hen you spend a whole day among trees [...] waking up with walls as horizons becomes unbearable".³⁰² Silence soon descends on Wharton's gathering in the harem in Fez and she notes that '[c]onversing through interpreters is a benumbing experience' (p.152), doubtlessly exacerbated by the fact that the interpreter is a son of the house who monitors what is said (also see p.155). The theme of surveillance and captivity features prominently in this account. Wharton describes the women as 'beings imprisoned in a conception of sexual and domestic life based on slave-service and incessant espionage' (p.152). The children of the harem are pitied for their '[i]gnorance, unhealthiness and [...] precocious sexual initiation' that involves girls married at eight or nine and a son 'given his first negress' at twelve and whereafter 'both sexes live till old age in an atmosphere of sensuality without seduction' (p.153). Wharton may be influenced by her own ignorance about sex prior to her wedding to Teddy, followed by a largely celibate marriage, when she objects to these customs.³⁰³ This is the second instance that sees Wharton question the Orientalist notion of an existence of sensual seduction in harems (also see p.151), which increases the impression of stifling confinement. Indeed, Mernissi reminisced over her Aunt Habiba's advice to ensure that the battle for women's liberation does 'not forget about sensuality'; "[w]hy rebel and change the world if you can't get what's missing in your life? And what is most definitely missing in our lives is love and lust."³⁰⁴ Mernissi described the domestic harem as

³⁰⁰ Freya Stark, *East is West* (London: John Murray, 1945), pp.30, 33.

³⁰¹ Funston, p.3.

³⁰² Mernissi, *Dreams*, p.59.

³⁰³ Erlich, p.16.

³⁰⁴ Mernissi, *Dreams*, p.133.

it existed in the colonised Moslem world as ‘rather dull’, ‘bourgeois’ and ‘with hardly any erotic dimension to speak of’.³⁰⁵ Elsewhere she explained the theory behind the seclusion (and veiling) of Moroccan women, which is to ‘prevent sexual interaction between members of the *umma* [the public sphere, restricted to men] and members of the domestic universe [the world of sexuality and the family]’.³⁰⁶ She added that the rationale behind such a preventative measure is the protection of ‘the passive male who cannot control himself sexually in the presence of the lust-inducing female’, subverting any idea of harems being spaces of fornication despite, as Wharton observed, the presence of concubines (p.151).³⁰⁷

Wharton’s final visit to a Moroccan harem takes place in Marrakech, where she is invited into the household of a local official. His harem was ‘recruited from Georgia’ and its members ‘had been brought up in the relative freedom of life in Constantinople’ (p.158). They draw Wharton’s attention to a collection of faded photographs of ‘beaming frumps’ in ‘dowdy European ball-dresses’, a reminder of their former life, and she understands that the images represent ‘freedom, happiness, and all they forfeited when fate [...] carried them from the Bosphorus to the Atlas’ (p.159). Her speculative characterisation of that fate as ‘probably [...] an opulent Hebrew couple “travelling with their daughters”’ (p.159) reinforces the sense of their enslavement, even as it again reveals Wharton’s anti-Semitic stance. The latter is especially jarring in comparison to Mernissi’s gentle characterisation of the Jewish community of Fez: ‘the Jews looked just like everyone else, dressing in long robes similar to our *djellebas*’; minded their own business and kept to their Mellah’; made ‘beautiful jewellery’ and pickled ‘vegetables in a most delicious way’. She adds that, like Muslims, ‘the Jews had their own prayers, loved their God, and taught His book to their children’.³⁰⁸

Mernissi’s work also indicated that the seclusion of women is not always perceived as negative. While it may seem ‘a source of oppression’ to western eyes, many Muslim women view it as ‘a source of pride’ and traditional women often see it as a sign of prestige; ‘[h]arems, the ultimate form of seclusion were considered even more prestigious since they required huge economic assets’.³⁰⁹ The prestige associated with veiling and seclusion in an Arab context comes out in the writing of aristocratic women, such as Sayyida Salama bint Said (1844-1924), Princess of Zanzibar, and Egyptian feminist, Huda Shaarawi (1879-1947). Said, writing under her western name, Emily Ruete, asserted that ‘her retired way of life

³⁰⁵ Ibid., p.35.

³⁰⁶ Mernissi, *Beyond*, pp.138, 140.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., p.142; also see pp.30-1.

³⁰⁸ Mernissi, *Dreams*, p.94.

³⁰⁹ Mernissi, *Beyond*, p.142.

makes the Arab woman appear more helpless and possessing fewer rights [than men]. But this is a custom existing with all Mahometan [...] nations in the East, and the higher the rank the more rigorously it is observed'.³¹⁰ Sharaawi also emphasised the ways in which harems and its members' places of origin – she notes that the Caucasus was a popular source area among Muslim elites – may function as status symbols.³¹¹ Amal Rassam observed that the ability to take a wife or series of wives is 'proof of [a man's] strength and high status' in Morocco.³¹² This web of ideas reveals a further irony at work – or perhaps a slow dawning realisation – in the critical gaze that Wharton directs at the workings of the harem. How different is what she witnesses in Morocco from the secluded, regulated but also pampered women of her own social set where working for a living was perceived, certainly still by her parents' generation, as distasteful?³¹³

Mernissi's recollection of Yasmina's complicated perspective on these institutions is informative. Her grandmother, who lived with her husband and eight co-wives, regarded being in a harem as a loss of freedom, as well as a 'misfortune because a woman had to share her husband with many others'.³¹⁴ She expected and was happy that her granddaughter's generation would not have to share their partners, but also valued the family to which she belonged:

we co-wives feel closer to one another than ever, although those who were slaves among us have tried to track down and contract their original families. We feel like sisters; our real family is the one that we have woven around our Grandfather.³¹⁵

What the diversity of perspectives presented here illustrates, is that Wharton's breaking of silence around the silences of Moroccan women in the home, and about their domination by men, always represents the gaze of the outsider looking into a foreign culture, and that while her observations are perceptive and rightly critical, they do not capture the whole spectrum of often complex local attitudes and understandings. This does not mean that what she has to say carries no weight. Ibtissam Bouachrine asked '[w]hat if women's oppression within the harem is in fact a reality, at least for some women, rather than Wharton's malicious colonial imperialist intervention?'.³¹⁶ Yet Wharton does not, as Tromly justly observed, take into account the potentially disruptive effect of her own presence on the freedom or quality of women's talk inside the harems that she visits.³¹⁷ Equally importantly, Mernissi would

³¹⁰ Emily Ruete, *Memoirs of an Arabian Princess: An Autobiography* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1888), p.149.

³¹¹ Huda Sharaawi, *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist (1879-1924)*, transl. by Margot Badran (New York: The Feminist Press, 1986), pp.8, 11, 16.

³¹² Amal Rassam, 'Women and Domestic Power in Morocco', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 12 (1980), 171-9 (p.173).

³¹³ Kassaroff, p.105.

³¹⁴ Mernissi, *Dreams*, p.34.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.34, 36.

³¹⁶ Ibtissam Bouachrine, *Women and Islam: Myths, Apologies, and the Limits of Feminist Critique* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014), p.43.

³¹⁷ Tromly, p.246.

remind her readers seventy years later that she knew, ‘as a woman, from [...] [her] ordinary daily interaction as a professional or emotional person, that silence does not mean consent or surrender’ and that ‘[e]very daily act we perform is embedded in an incredibly intricate network of pressures, constraints, necessary compromises’.³¹⁸ She addressed a reality that Wharton herself recognises in her portrayal of contemporary western women in *The Reef*, where female silence may signal submission as well as resistance.

Mernissi’s is the one-time insider’s view, like Ruete’s, who was quick to dismiss the ‘great deal of sentimental pity wasted on the Eastern woman’; she added tellingly that the latter is ‘perfectly unaware that any constraint is put upon her, and habit makes the greatest inconveniences bearable after a time’.³¹⁹ Her perspective, too, may have been biased, trained on a particular social sphere, but Ruete lamented the fact that foreigners do not have more ‘frequent opportunities to observe the cheerfulness, the exuberance of spirits, even, of Eastern women’, adding that if they had, ‘stories afloat about the degraded, oppressed, and listless state of their life’ would be shown as fallacies.³²⁰ The limited nature of what foreigners are allowed to perceive was addressed directly by Ruete, who noted forthrightly that western women visitors to an harem have ‘no opportunity whatsoever of learning anything of the domestic life or the position of Eastern women’.³²¹ Despite his ‘innate hospitality, the Arab has the greatest possible objection to having his home pried into by those of another land or creed’; following the astonishment at western female dress – notably over the ‘enormous circumferences of her dress’ – and subsequent ‘very meagre conversation’ confined to differences in costume, ‘the lady retired as wise as she was when she came’, having been conducted into and out of the harem and ‘watched all the time’.³²² Such a lady would certainly not have been privy to its intellectual dimension, brought to life by Mernissi’s descriptions of her aunt Habiba’s story-telling and her cousin Chama’s household plays, including ones that dramatised the lives of Lebanese and Egyptian feminists, such as Shaarawi.³²³ Wharton does not mention Ruete’s memoir, which demonstrates the ability of an harem woman, once freed from constraints, to transform herself into something else, in this case a celebrated author like Wharton herself. Her silence is confusing, but only until one reads *Memoirs* as a text with the potential to undermine *In Morocco*’s portrayal of harem women, as well as its author’s authority.

³¹⁸ Mernissi, *Beyond*, p.xv.

³¹⁹ Ruete, p.150.

³²⁰ Ibid., p.156.

³²¹ Ibid., p.157.

³²² Ibid., pp.156-7.

³²³ Mernissi, *Dreams*, pp.17-9, 130.

Despite the perceived shortcomings of her criticism that possibly includes insufficient appreciation of the implications behind the vacuous chatter, apparent dullness and general muteness encountered in the harems that she visited, Wharton presents her account of Morocco explicitly as that of a westerner and a woman by emphasising her dependence on her diplomatic ties in Morocco, the idea that this is a journey through the unknown, ‘*a country without a guide-book*’ (p.21), and her unprecedented access to spaces forbidden to male visitors. This narrative woven around *In Morocco* alerted contemporary reviewers to the unparalleled platform occupied by its writer. The *Times Literary Supplement* noted that, reflecting the same characteristics as her war reportage, Wharton ‘saw, in addition to the ordinary “sights”, many that until recently no foreigner – certainly no foreign woman – would have been allowed to see’; the *Nation* found that ‘[u]nder the guidance of the French Ministry of Fine Arts and as the guest of Madame Lyautey, Mrs. Wharton found herself admitted to many ceremonials from which she as a foreigner and as a woman would under ordinary circumstances have been doubly barred’; and the Boston *Evening Transcript* reminded its readers that ‘Morocco is Moslem and Near East, but General Lyautey’s work has made an opening to Europeans unknown before’.³²⁴ Tromly may have questioned Wharton’s ‘feminism’ on the basis that it ‘provides a moral ratification of French colonialism’, involving ‘a white woman exhorting white men to save brown women from brown men’, but Ammons rightly pointed out that Wharton sees the same forces that dominate women in Morocco at work in the west, in middle France, New England and New York, and that her observations in North Africa are reflected in her criticism of the treatment of western women that are sexually transgressive in texts like *Summer* and *The Age of Innocence* (EWA, p.143).³²⁵ Tromly’s claim that Wharton adopts a masculine agency through her colonial sympathies and mere presence in Morocco, which sets her apart from local women who remain secluded in their harems, also requires further scrutiny.³²⁶

While Wharton often finds herself ‘trespassing’ in the world of Moroccan men, she recognises the distance between a life in tents, cedar forests, or sea-blown gardens and the stifling atmosphere of the Fazi harem and speaks out against the ‘gilded cage’. What one cannot deny is that she operates in a male sphere when she engages in cultural diplomacy on behalf of France and follows explicitly in the footsteps of male travel writers like John Windus when she makes her revelations about this country’s latest colonial acquisition, aimed especially at her American readers. Her keen support of French intervention in Morocco is counterbalanced by mute indifference to its fundamentally political and

³²⁴ Tuttleton, Lauer and Murray, pp.300-2.

³²⁵ Tromly, p.242; also see Fay, pp.3-5.

³²⁶ Tromly, p.242.

economic agenda. Indeed, this careful breaking and keeping of silence is what makes *In Morocco* a story, rather than an objective report; it represents Wharton's Morocco. As in *Fighting France*, Wharton also regularly reminds readers that she is a woman; indeed this is what allows her to comment substantially on Moroccan women. *In Morocco*, despite its prejudices – its pro-colonial, Orientalist attitude – stands out in Wharton's body of work for its outspoken critique of the position of women; whether right or wrong, nowhere else does she speak as explicitly and urgently about this matter. *In Morocco* breaks not only the silences surrounding Wharton's north African theme, or the variety of silences that she finds operating within it, but it also breaks her own silence to reveal unexpectedly strong 'feminist' persuasions.

IV. SILENCES: A CONCLUSION

Wharton's rendition of Morocco, as well as its colonial overlords, is characterised by an almost gymnastic engagement with silence. In its propagandist guise, Wharton becomes the mouthpiece of France the nation-under-siege, much as she is in *Fighting France*. Her main concern at the outbreak of war, and right up to the point that America joined the Allied war effort, was to garner support for her adopted country. This she achieved by telling a story in which a nation's silence becomes a symbol of their heroism and worthiness to be saved, strategically maintaining and breaking silences that relate to the nature of the conflict, and, finally, by using her singular voice to comment on a phenomenon about which women traditionally have remained silent. She does the same when she brings to life France the coloniser in *In Morocco*. As such she shows her readers how a woman may venture ever further into the realms of men, to speak on behalf of a country battling to preserve its borders and those that they protect, but also on behalf of that country as it works to assert itself within someone else's borders. In this she evolves from speaking for the victim to speaking for the assailant in a world of increasingly murky morality, an evolution that necessitates her silence around the more discomfiting aspects of French intervention in Morocco, in the same way that her war reportage advocates for American involvement in the war by writing more circumspectly about what the conflict really looks like and about what it demands from those that participate in it. Her thematic silences in both texts may be described as fictionalising. Read purely as travel writing, *In Morocco* comments on silence. Often contrasted with sound, it is an essential part of Wharton's revelatory tactic, or the defining feature of a place. As a 'feminist' critique, the book is outspoken about the socio-political silencing of Moroccan women, as understood by Wharton. Her post-war stories explore this practice in other cultural contexts with reference to her experiences in Morocco but *The Reef*, written shortly before the Great War, is likewise concerned with women's silences 'at home'. Here she shows women's fear of speaking out, and the consequences of

doing so, but her persistent interest in how women also may effect change through their silences, alongside an increasing anxiety over the extent to which such silence is freely chosen or socially imposed, are knitted tightly into the narrative of *The Reef*. While Wharton silences her female characters, her aim is to interrogate rather than advocate the ‘muzzling’ of women. These points of intersection lend *The Reef*, *Fighting France* and *In Morocco* a distinctive Whartonian character that supersedes generic labels and results in a form of story-telling that enlightens as it obscures and probes even as it endorses, whether she casts her eye over that part of the world that she knows best – the genteel household – or dares to do the same with its furthest reaches.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

The central argument of this thesis is that secrets and silences occupy a prominent position in Edith Wharton's writing and that these intersecting concepts may be used to advance original readings of a selection of her works, and the critical dialogue around her writing in relation to its portrayal of women and their experiences. I revisit this argument in the first part of my conclusion in order to present the findings that respond to each of my original research questions, and so articulate the original contribution to knowledge made by this thesis. I also reflect on and suggest how the study of secrets and silences, as well as Wharton's 'feminism', might be extended in future research. In the second part of this conclusion my focus shifts outwards. As I draft this discussion, scholars and other readers of Wharton celebrate the centenary of *The Age of Innocence*, a novel as acclaimed by the critics as by popular audiences at the time of its first publication and one that continues to attract new readers. At the same time a storm unleashed by natural, political and social forces rages across the United States of America in 2020. In the second part of this conclusion I contextualise the study of Wharton's writing as a contemporary reader also witnessing movements that involve the widespread and penetrating interrogation of the *status quo* and demand change.

I. CONTRIBUTION OF THIS THESIS AND NEW LINES OF ENQUIRY

1. Wharton and secrecy

In Chapter 2 I considered Wharton's portrayals of women as the owners or keepers of secrets in *The House of Mirth*, *The Custom of the Country*, *The Fruit of the Tree*, *Summer* and *The Age of Innocence*. It focused particularly on fictional secrets in these texts in terms of their evolving life histories, on textual secrets that feature obliquely, and on Wharton's expectations of her readers.

I asked whether there is a relationship between the fact that so many of Wharton's fictional secret owners or keepers are women, and the nature of secrets in her narratives. My textual analysis has shown that the number of women in Wharton's novels that own or keep secrets is striking, and the nature of what they withhold in her narratives reveals the unique experiences of and negotiations by women at various points in their lives. Wharton's female characters contend with and conceal illicit affairs, previous marriages, pregnancy out of wedlock, even mercy killing, and the common denominator among their narratives is that the potential fallout of the secret affects women disproportionately. The risk that the secret poses to women is considerably higher than to men and often frustrates their ability to act. Women's financial and physical security, interpersonal relationships, social standing and

future prospects are intimately connected to the protection of the fictional secret. But there are many more published texts by Wharton that may be studied for their portrayal of women's secrets. Tales such as *The Old Maid* and *New Year's Day* (1924), *The Mother's Recompense* (1925) and 'Roman Fever' (1934) could not be accommodated in this thesis, but brim with secrets. Wharton's much earlier play, *The Shadow of a Doubt* (~1901) establishes her long-standing awareness of the power of the secret and its particular impact on women's lives. Consideration of such newly discovered, lesser-known or lesser-studied work in terms of this theme may take advantage of the pending publications in *The Complete Works of Edith Wharton* series that will ensure the future accessibility of her writing across all genres, in scholarly format.

A further research question of this thesis was whether it makes a difference that Wharton was a woman who herself guarded secrets throughout her life. My study of Wharton's biographical and autobiographical information, and the results of my archival research conducted in the Edith Wharton Collection at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, support the argument that Wharton drew on her own lived experience as a woman, a private citizen, and a public figure, which included owning and protecting secrets that ranged between being comparatively harmless or well-meaning and potentially explosive, to create richly characterised fictional women responding to real-world concerns. Her own first-hand knowledge enabled her to construct the abundance of women's secrets that occurs in her body of work. The sheer size of Wharton's existing archival collection, the fact that only a small fraction of her personal letters has been published, and the strong likelihood of future discoveries, raise the odds of uncovering further evidence of secrets in her life and/or extending understanding of some biographical details that remain shrouded in mystery. If the novelist's secrets that came to light after 1968 are any indication, it seems reasonable that introducing similar information into the public domain today would necessitate further ethical deliberation by Wharton scholars. Would biographical information that paints an 'unbecoming' picture of the novelist, such as the evidence of anti-Semitism discovered in her correspondence by the Lewises, for example, be swept under the carpet today?

My thesis has also explored connections between the gender of the secret keeper and how, why and when information is withheld or disclosed, and found that the manner, motivation and timing of the protection or disclosure of secrets are explicitly gendered. As part of this examination, I established the life history of fictional secrets in Wharton's novels, both in volume and serialised texts, and the effects of their evolution. This new approach to Wharton's novels demonstrated her meticulous control over her story telling, as well as her ability to engage and hold her readers' attention by harnessing the power of fictional secrets.

Like the first, this research question may be applied to works and genres other than Wharton's often best-known novels and/or compare her handling of men's secrets to those of women to ask how similar or different the life history of a Dr Carruther's secret is to that of a Kate Derwent (in the play, *The Shadow of a Doubt*), or of a Denis or Dick Peyton's to that of a Kate Orme (in the novella, *Sanctuary*), and to assess the extent to which Wharton's focus on women's lives sharpened over time.

The last research question relating to secrets in Wharton's writing was whether there is a larger interpretative system in operation, consciously knitted into her body of work, but visible only to the reader who takes a broader view. Based on my own textual analysis and on Wharton's enlightening 1903 essay, 'The Vice of Reading', I propose that her women characters possess and guard secrets that function like an ever-present executive function across her novels. Their omnipresence chimed with contemporary readers' interest in secrecy and ensured the continued loyalty of Wharton's audiences, especially those reading for the story. But drawing and building on existing literary criticism I also identify running alongside this prominent seam of fictional secrets, the more subtle textual secrets of Wharton's novels – involving addiction, personal agency, women's bodies, the attraction of the unlived life or the 'wrong' person – that reward her re-readers and that often, like her fictional secrets, speak to the concerns of her time and of ours too. A research question for the present day is how attuned Wharton's twenty-first-century audiences are to the centrality of the fictional secret in her writing and how it influences loyalty to her work. Reader engagement research may reveal whether secrecy functions as unifying thread across her work today, or whether such 'prosaic' attractions are outweighed by the thematic concerns of her work, or by its classical appeal.

2. Wharton and silences

In Chapter 3 I shifted the focus to silences in *The Reef*, *Fighting France*, and *In Morocco*, to assess Wharton's position on women's voices in private and progressively public contexts, across three different genres.

My first research question was if and how Wharton silences her female characters, and whether she thought that they should not speak, or may have muted their voices for other, more radical, reasons. Drawing on my own textual analysis, archival research in the Edith Wharton Collection, and the critical writing of others, I concluded that Anna Leath's silent aloofness defines women of Wharton's generation and class, and is integral to the plot of *The Reef*. Wharton interrogates Anna's reserve and ultimately rejects it as a justification for male misbehaviour. As a rhetorical device, Anna's refusal to speak at times imbues her with

power and influence of her own, suggesting that the social muzzling of women sometimes forces them to repurpose their silences in order to undermine male dominance. My textual analysis posed Sophy Viner's liberal speech as a counterpoint to Anna's silence, but I read her victimisation as an exposition of male exploitation, rather than as a sanction for her lack of restraint. While she appears to approve of reserve, Wharton does not contend that women should be silenced. Together, these two fictional characters represent a powerful case study of Wharton's complex attitude towards female silences and her subversive thinking around female silencing, but her body of work offers much more material to be read for its portrayal of silences. My thesis has only touched briefly on *Ethan Frome*, but this text examines not only female but also male silence, while the earlier *Sanctuary*, which shares thematic concerns, including parent-child relationships and the moral dimensions of silence, with *The Reef*, sees a young man explicitly acknowledge the positive influence of his mother's silence on him. A further work that invites an in-depth study of its silences is Wharton's one complete, extant play. Such a project might ask how BBC Radio 3's 2018 production of *The Shadow of a Doubt* approached the silences in this manuscript that is remarkable both for what it withholds in order to protect a fictional secret, but also for its liberal use of ellipses and numerous stage directions calling for pauses, silences and the quiet delivery of lines.¹ Lastly, my investigation of Wharton's portrayals of female silence in *The Reef* has been accompanied by the knowledge that Wharton herself refused to be silenced, especially in a professional capacity. It would be revealing to view her career, which became a metaphor for resisting silence, through a feminist lens. A comparative enquiry that takes account of other contemporary women writers could prove especially instructive. Olin-Ammentorp's recent appraisal of Wharton and Cather demonstrates just one potentially rewarding pairing; others might include Vernon Lee, and/or Gertrude Stein.²

Next I asked what Wharton's engagement with silences looks like, first in her war and then in her travel writing. I relied on my own close reading of primary texts and on critical writing, and also on Wharton's biographical material. To write the articles that became *Fighting France*, Wharton called on her privileged social network to gain access to the war zone, in the same way that her presence in Morocco two years later resulted directly from her social connections. *Fighting France* sees her harness her powers of revelation and persuasion – largely reliant on her identity as Edith Wharton, well-known and well-read woman writer – in support of the Allied cause. However, even as she breaks the silence around the war and vividly portrays the front, characterised by its interplay between silence

¹ Edith Wharton, 'Drama on 3: *The Shadow of a Doubt*', BBC Radio 3, 28 October 2018 <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/proginfo/2018/44/drama-on-3>> [accessed 23 November 2020].

² Olin-Ammentorp, *Edith Wharton, Willa Cather*.

and noise, Wharton's admiration for stoic reserve and silence continues to be foregrounded. The 2015 discovery of 'The Field of Honour' is a welcome reminder that Wharton's body of war writing continues to grow. In the meantime, her known writings dating to that period, such as *The Marne*, *A Son at the Front*, the short stories, and the poetry, are worth subjecting to readings focused on her and their implicit and explicit silences. Wharton's account of French Morocco is as multi-faceted as *Fighting France* in terms of its engagement with silences. At times, *In Morocco* reads like a 'how-to' instruction manual for conducting colonialism and implicates Wharton as an accomplished practitioner of soft power diplomacy. She is firmly on the side of Morocco's French rulers and never hesitates to say so. She self-consciously lifts a metaphorical veil to reveal the country's 'hitherto shrouded' past to those who will hopefully visit Morocco themselves to admire its natural and cultural landscapes, so often shown off to best effect by their silences. As my thesis has demonstrated, Wharton's interest in this theme was evident as early as 1888, when she and Teddy cruised around the Aegean, recorded in *The Cruise of the Vanadis*. Wharton's other travel accounts, such as *Italian Villas and their Gardens* (1904), *Italian Backgrounds* (1905) and *A Motor-Flight Through France* (1908), however, are yet to be considered in terms of the theme of silence in relation to place.

Finally, I asked in this thesis if and how Wharton uses her own voice to try and say what may be unsayable. Critical accounts of the war help to establish that Wharton's war reportage in 1915 formed part of the first wave of accounts that disseminated information that officials sought to suppress for political reasons. My thesis pursued claims by critical readings of *Fighting France* that Wharton shies away from expressing the human cost of the conflict, and has argued that this allegation is overstated. I have proposed that her apparent privileging of broken culture over broken bodies also becomes fathomable when her dual objective to inform and advocate are taken into account, an aim that requires her to modulate or self-censor her message. My preliminary reading of Wharton's incomplete, unpublished short story, 'The Men Who Saved The World', in the Edith Wharton Collection is that it provides compelling evidence that Wharton attempted a more candid exploration of the broken body in war, before abandoning the endeavour.³ This manuscript along with any relevant correspondence may help to shed further light on Wharton's silence and speech concerning the war. During 1914-1918 Wharton experienced something that saw her instinct for restraint evaporate with uncharacteristic candor. She perceived the silenced women in colonial Morocco's harems as stifled, stunted and voiceless. Because this is a writer who advocates, propagandises and fictionalises as she moves nimbly across genres, it is possible

³ 'The Men Who Saved the World' typescript. Series I, Box 17, Folder 517.

that her emphasis on silenced women was intended to serve a colonialist agenda, but the complexity of Wharton's 'feminism' and the bluntness with which she tackles the matter here have encouraged me to assert that her dislike and concern are sincere and to be taken at face value. The 'unsayable' things that Wharton voiced in works like *Fighting France* and *In Morocco* are counteracted by those that remained unsaid between the novelist and individuals closest to her, but that may be investigated through the archives of those in her social and professional network. For example, for all James' sighing over Wharton's tendency to dominate proceedings and dictate grueling travel schedules, he was devoted to her and she to him. Wharton's clandestine attempts to support James financially are well known, but she also seems to have diluted information relating to her success as a playwright or to the war, and to have avoided other topics altogether, such as his sexuality or change of citizenship. A study of things that remained unvoiced between Wharton and James has the potential to complicate the conventional narrative around a relationship that proved so defining of Wharton's reputation as a writer and her reception even today.

II. WHARTON IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

In 1920, the year that saw the publication of Wharton's Pulitzer Prize winning novel, *The Age of Innocence*, the United States ratified the 19th Amendment to give the majority of American women the right to vote as citizens of that country – barring African-American women, like men – close to a century after the fight for women's suffrage began. Three years prior to the adoption of women's suffrage, the National Women's Party had organised a silent picket. The 1917 demonstration by the 'Silent Sentinels' at the White House was the first of its kind in American history and turned the tide in favour of the suffragists.⁴ The centennial of Wharton's seminal work about American culture, then, coincides with the celebration of one of its pivotal twentieth-century political moments. There is some irony in the fact that Wharton, who was not remotely interested in women's suffrage, was keenly attuned to the often-troubling experiences of women and seems to have been compelled to express them through her writing. Wharton's work similarly reflects other dominant social issues at the time, such as racial inequality and immigration. These issues continued to draw attention and even appeared to resolve themselves at certain points during the last century. Native Americans were granted citizenship in all states in 1962, while the passing of the Voting Rights Act in 1965 ensured the rights of Black voters – a change that was long overdue, given the involvement of Black women in the suffragist movement since the late nineteenth century. On the ground, however, historical victories of the previous century have often seemed to bring momentary relief instead of lasting improvement.

⁴ Anon., 'Woman Suffrage and the 19th Amendment', US National Archives and Records Administration, 27 June 2019 <<https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/woman-suffrage>> [accessed 6 December 2020].

In her introduction to a newly published volume of centenary essays on *The Age of Innocence*, Arielle Zibrak referred to a slogan often seen in recent years at protests involving women's issues: 'I can't believe I still have to protest this fucking shit'.⁵ During the time that I have investigated Wharton's secrets and silences, we have entered an era of heightened awareness of the ongoing physical and psychological abuse of women in private and public contexts, signalled by contemporary vocabulary like '#MeToo', 'Time's Up', and 'gaslighting'; politicised attacks on women's reproductive rights; the gender pay gap; period poverty; honour killings; forced marriages; trafficking of women and girls; and disproportionate and terrifying, online harassment aimed at women who dare 'to speak truth to power', to use another expression of the time we live in. The continued underrepresentation of women in the political arena or in business seems tame in comparison. These problems are of the twenty-first century, but they are also the product of centuries of unjust thinking about women's rights. Edith Wharton may not have been familiar with our language for injustice, but she would have recognised the fundamental inequalities that it describes. In a recent essay, entitled 'The Problem with Sex is Capitalism', Solnit proposed the following:

Feminism and capitalism are at odds, if under the one women are people and under the other they are property. [...] Women's status is ambiguous in relation to sexual experience [...]: as a commodity you must be desirable, but the results of that desirability – erotic contact – can be regarded as making you used, contaminated, impure, due for punishment. [...] Both being sexual and not being sexual are prone to punishment, and the ideal woman is supposed to be both, neither, and something impossible in between.⁶

These words capture perfectly the situation that so many of Wharton's women are required to negotiate, and demonstrate that despite her complex, even disconcerting attitude to feminism, Wharton's writing remains a valuable tool for investigating our world.

Placing the work of a major twentieth-century writer like Wharton under the microscope is an opportunity to review progress and, in many respects, lack thereof. It reveals the need to continue breaking the silences and exposing the secrets where they continue to undermine women, but also other historically marginalised communities. Scholars of Wharton's work – an academic community whose appreciation of Wharton's writing is at the heart of all its endeavours – often find themselves wrestling with her prejudices and biases. Racist and anti-Semitic tendencies are jarring aspects of Wharton's reputation, but Wharton scholarship is not served well by attempts to understate or deny their existence, especially at a time when the rise of populist governments sees such sentiments gaining ground. At this confluence of

⁵ Arielle Zibrak, 'Introduction', in *Edith Wharton's The Age of Innocence: New Centenary Essays*, ed. by Arielle Zibrak (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), pp.1-20 (p.6).

⁶ Solnit, *Whose Story*, pp.93-4.

centenaries and calls for gender and racial equality, exemplified by the potent Black Lives Matter movement, it is more pertinent than ever that Wharton's personal shortcomings be scrutinised, even as her professional achievements are celebrated. Had she been a lesser writer, a less generous woman in so many other respects, they may have appeared more insignificant. Writing about Wharton and *The Age of Innocence* in 2011, Ta-Nehisi Coates claimed the right '[...] to love the dead, regardless of who the dead, in a different time, deemed worthy of love'.⁷ But if a legacy is to last, its most challenging components need to be confronted, processed and expressed. They cannot be shrouded in secrecy.

Edith Wharton's Massachusetts home, today a writer's house museum, offers a useful example of how such a reckoning can manifest itself and support those that the dead may not have 'deemed worthy of love'.⁸ The Mount has been transformed into a cultural centre with the express aim to engage with, and make itself accessible to, a diverse audience. In 2020 this move towards inclusivity involved two parallel, yet thematically connected workshop series. One, led by The Mount's Artist-in-Residence Lia Russell-Self, was a creative writing workshop directed at young, queer people of colour. The other, 'Creative Reading: Imagining Reclamation and Healing', invited people without direct experience of racism or homophobia to explore Black, indigenous and queer traditions through relevant theoretical frameworks.⁹ Meanwhile, The Mount's *Discourse & Process* lecture series is notable for the culturally diverse selection of modern writers and titles that it showcases. These initiatives to foster greater understanding, empathy and respect across culturally and politically constructed divides between people of different gender, race and/or sexual orientation, recognise the transformative power of story telling. They grasp that texts represent creative forces that 'place' people – that one may be written or read into the world, or given voice, just as one may be written or read out of it, or silenced. And they demonstrate that scrutinising aspects of Wharton's legacy that are unacceptable to contemporary, liberal audiences, is itself a restorative act of story telling. My thesis has interrogated how Wharton employs secrets and silences to place women in the world, to tell their stories and give them voice. Bringing the perspective of secrets and silences to bear on other social concerns in her work, may prove just as rewarding.

⁷ Ta-Nehisi Coates, 'The Age of Awesome', *The Atlantic*, 22 April 2011

<<https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2011/04/the-age-of-awesome/237713/>> [accessed 4 December 2020].

⁸ Nicola Watson's innovative research on the emergence of the writer's house museum as a cultural phenomenon in North America, Britain and Europe is noteworthy. See Nicola J. Watson, *The Author's Effects: On Writer's House Museums* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

⁹ Michelle Daly, 'Creative Reading Workshop: Imagining Reclamation and Healing', The Mount: Edith Wharton's Home, 2020 <https://www.edithwharton.org/event/creative-reading-workshop-imagining-reclamation-and-healing/?instance_id=19974> [accessed 5 December 2020]; Lia Russell-Self, 'Creative Writing Workshop: Healing Through Nature', The Mount: Edith Wharton's Home, 2020 <https://www.edithwharton.org/event/creative-healing-workshop/?instance_id=19964> [accessed 5 December 2020].

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